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THE RETURN OF THE TURATH: THE ARAB RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION 1959-2000

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THE RETURN OF THE TURATH: THE ARAB RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION 1959-2000

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

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Abstract

The Six-Day War in 1967 ended an era characterized by cultural exuberance and political optimism, ushering the Arab world into a period rife with economic anxiety and political unrest. Formerly powerful Arab armies disbanded. Firm social conventions were called into question. Radical movements (right and left) were on the rise. Maverick writers, philosophers, poets, and cultural critics authored influential critiques that profoundly undermined the ideals holding Arab society together, including Islamic faith and nationalism. The sea changes triggered by the war, however, resist easy categorization and defy simple historical narration that would attribute them only to the diverging trends of iconoclasm on the Left and traditionalism on the Right. The question of what exactly was defeated in the 1967 war continues to harangue historians and remains as relevant as it was in those tumultuous times. Historians may never stop arguing about which historical currents reignited the new intellectual debates that came to the fore in the wake of the defeat. These debates increasingly focused on the Turāth (roughly defined as the Arab past, cultural heritage, and authenticity) that irrevocably changed the political vocabulary and intellectual frameworks in the contemporary Arab region.

For the vanquished Arab nations, the 1967 war marked two fundamental developments: First, it asserted the growing power of culture on shaping people's political orientation and social choices. Formerly it was economic disparity that seemed to hold Arab society back. After the defeat, however, it was dated cultural norms, values and mores that seemed to bedevil Arab society even more. Increasingly the military defeat in the Arab-Israeli war in 1967 was conceived as a cultural defeat, steering many Leftist intellectuals to engage in cultural debates that relegated economic and political factors to the margins. Second, the defeat made it clear that the so-called Arab Turāth was not withering away. The war resuscitated Arab intellectuals' attention to their past, cementing new cultural orientations that increasingly focused on Arab authenticity. While the debate surrounding the Turāth dates back to the late nineteenth century, it acquired new meanings and cultural relevance in the post-1967 era, as intellectuals began to take Arab post-colonial conditions into account. The Turāth challenged certain basic precepts that had been part of Arab culture, especially the faith in Western philosophies, the inevitability of progress, the linearity and homogeneity of time, and the universality of secularism. The Turāth encouraged a search for a forgotten Arab culture and gave rise to words like authenticity (Asalah) and cultural onslaught, which grew increasingly common.

The discourse on the Turāth transformed Arab political and intellectual conversations in a variety of ways. It produced major political realignment, creating a coalition of previously left-wing and moderate Islamists in big-cities. It also strengthened North-African scholars' presence in the post-1967 Arab intellectual landscape, spawning scholars like Jabiri who outlined the Turāth as the defining problem with which Arab intellectuals had to cope. It fundamentally altered the authority of the intellectual tradition that originated in Beirut and Cairo. It transformed the economy of the intellectual debates by introducing new cultural references, such as self-critique, that had been unpopular

before the war. Above all, it led Arab intellectuals to view the Turāth less as a reservoir of archaic norms, and more as the ultimate protector of Arabs' human dignity under Arab regimes, which were prone to viewing modern constitutions and legal laws as instruments of power rather than justice.

The debate over the Turāth not only brought a new breed of Arab voices into the intellectual landscape, but it also led to the creation of the first anti-Turāth movement in the Arab world. The *Arab Rationalist Association*, a constellation of Arab intellectuals who gathered around Syrian writer Jūrj Ṭarābīshī in Paris, formed in protest against the cultural obsession with "things authentic." These intellectuals argued that the Turāth literature was a mere means of escapism, distracting Arabs from their real and pressing problems, reinforcing older values, and dampening political radicalism. For these cultural critics, the Turāth literature is not politically neutral, but rather a literature that fosters cultural sensibilities that antagonize difference and look suspiciously at Western philosophies. The *Arab Rationalist Association* questioned everything from false attempts to fashion modern forms of reliving the past, to moderate Islamic moral codes, through different forms of patriotism. Who were the members of the association? What are the cultural and social concerns that banded them together? Why did they reject the Turāth and to what ends? This dissertation illuminates why the Turāth gained more traction in post-colonial society and how it changed the Arab intellectual conversation.

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1970, Morocco celebrated the graduation of the first student in the country's history ever to be granted a Ph.D.. Moḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī was 34-years-old when he defended his work for six hours in front of a committee of five professors. The first recipient of a doctorate, Jābirī would soon rise to national prominence in a post-colonial state longing for national pride, a country that long suffered from French colonialism that inflected it with a legacy of cultural inferiority. Though a limited number of Moroccan students had previously attained doctoral degrees- in France- Jābirī's was different. Defying established protocols, he insisted on writing his dissertation in Arabic, signaling the rise of a generation eager to explore its lost, unwritten history. Jābirī surely gave evidence to that unspoken cultural ambition when he wrote on Ibn Khaldūn, one of the eminent medieval Arab philosophers of North Africa.[1]

Jābirī's dissertation would not have stirred much intellectual commotion had it not signaled the profound change Arab thought was intensely undergoing. It gave a clear expression to a growing emphasis placed by rising intellectuals of the post-colonial state on what is called Arab and Islamic Turāth.[2] Perhaps more than any other Arab intellectual, Jābirī illuminated the new modes in Arab thought, reinforcing its newfound anxiety with the Turāth. Soon thereafter, numerous works of Arabic literature would propose new ways to write Arab and Islamic history that disrupted the boundaries once separating the past from the present. Though the debate on the Turāth preceded Jābirī's, his writings had immensely influenced the way the Turāth was examined and conceived, casting it as the chief *problematique* (Ishkāliyyah) in post-colonial Arab experience.

When Jābirī published *Nahnu wal-Turāth* (We and the Turāth) in 1979, a book that elaborated on the diverse ways current Arabic speakers are emotionally related and existentially attached to the Turāth, his work struck a chord with many readers. The remarkable reception of this book signaled that an age in Arab thought had begun just as the old era of detesting the Turāth faded away. Previously it was

[1] Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī. *Fikr Ibn Khaldūn: Al-ʿAṣabīyah Wa-Al-Dawlah: Maʿālim Naẓarīyah Khaldūnīyah Fī Al-Tārīkh Al-Islāmī*. al-Ṭabʿah 2 (Casablanca: Nashr al-Maghribīyah, 1979).

[2] Resisting an easy translation, scholars have referred to the Turāth in a variety of ways as we will see below. "Arab cultural inheritance," "Islamic history," "the past," "tradition," "cultural heritage." The Turāth here denotes to the ways the past is practiced/conceived in the present. More on the meaning of this idea see below.

Qunsṭantīn Zurīq's remarkable work *Nahnu wal-Tārīkh* (We and History) published in 1959, that captured the intellectual mood of the 1950-1960s. With the beginning of 1970s, however, it was clear that Zurīq's method, with its condescending attitude towards the Turāth, had grown outdated.

Yet, more than Jābirī's rise and popularity announced the dethroning of Zurīq, it marked a more pervasive and far reaching trend in contemporary Arab thought: the rise of the *Maghreb*. Rarely had Morocco's (as well as Algeria and Libya) intellectuals been seen as vital players shaping the architecture of Arab intellectual thought. For decades, the hubs of Arab thought clustered in the Mashriq (eastern Mediterranean), in cities like Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, Aleppo, Damascus and Baghdad. The *Maghreb* was persistently viewed as the intellectual backwaters of the Arab world. It was in the *Mashriq* rather than the Maghreb (North Africa), where the literary ferment took place during the late nineteenth-century. In these flowering cities, the Arab *nahḍa* was articulated as Morocco played only a marginal role in its making. This unconscious geography of the *nahḍa*, endorsed and consecrated in current historiography,[3] was disrupted for the first time during the 1970s with the rise of intellectuals from the margins. These intellectuals, following Jābirī's lead, gave rise to new cultural concerns and intellectual questions the *Mashriq* excluded and made almost unthinkable.

This dissertation's main concern is to interrogate the ways in which a growing swath of Arab intellectuals turned to study the Turāth. Though the Turāth is by no means a new idea, in the mid 1970s, scores of Arab intellectuals took to study the Turāth, following the path Jābirī paved.[4] Previously despised and reviled, the Turāth now assumed a new symbolic meaning, transforming from a mere idea to an established field of study in the post-colonial Arab world.[5] Examining the cultural and social

[3] Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914*, The California World History Library 13 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Fawaz A. A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Christoph Schumann, ed., *Nationalism and Liberal Thought in the Arab East: Ideology and Practice*, SOAS/Routledge Studies on the Middle East (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2010); Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[4] In 1973, Syrian poet Adonis published his dissertation on the Turāth. See Adūnīs, *Al-Thābit Wa-Al-Mutaḥawwil: Baḥth Fī Al-Ittibāʿ Wa-Al-Ibdāʿ ʿinda Al-ʿArab*. al-Ṭabʿah 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1986).

[5] On the ways in which the "Turath has increasing acted as the marker of a consensus of communication" see Armando Salvatore, "The Rationl Authentication of Turāth in Contemporary Arab Thought: Muhammad Al-Jābiri and Hasan Hanafī" *The Muslim World* 85, no. 3–4 (1995): 191–214.

circumstances that prompted the trend toward the investigation of the Turāth after a decades-long obsession with Western philosophy that instilled a dismissive attitude toward the Turāth, this dissertation addresses a number of questions. Why did the shift in Arab intellectual frameworks take place during the 1970s? What does it mean to (re)turn to the Turāth? What does this turn toward tradition look like and how did it play out in the lives of Arab intellectuals? While I approach all these questions from different angles, there is a special emphasis on the consequences (political and otherwise) of this engagement with the Turāth. What are the new cultural concerns the discourse on the Turāth generated and sustained? What were the public responses and reactions to the explorations of the Turāth? Arab intellectuals' frantic explorations of the Turāth are quite baffling but also by no means unique or exceptional. What meanings did Arab intellectuals ascribe to the Turāth? Was it a search after their cultural authenticity? Was it a new reckoning with the past? The collective appeal to the study of the Turāth bears striking resemblance to other post-colonial experiences where intellectuals resorted to study their authenticity and pasts.[6] The disenchantment with the performances of the nation state in a variety of non-Western spaces spurred intellectual trends that sought to reconstruct different pasts, which "denaturalize" and "provincialize" the linear and romanticized narratives nation states forcefully forged and circulated.[7] While this was a general movement in a variety of post-colonial settings, it remains unclear what sets apart Arab intellectuals' drift toward retrieving their "forgotten Turāth" as Jābirī's forcefully demonstrated.

While the Turāth debates serve as the focal point of this project, the thrust of this dissertation is to explore only the voices that rejected and condemned the newfound cultural obsession with the Turāth. One of the outspoken intellectuals who dedicated his life to casting off the Turāth was Syrian Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. Born in Aleppo in 1939 to a middle-class family, Ṭarābīshī was an enthusiastic translator who rendered more than one hundred Western works (Sartre, Campus, Hegel, Marx, and Freud, among others,) into Arabic before turning to engage Arab writers' enchantment with the Turāth during the late 1980s.

[6] In India, for example, post-colonial historians established the field of Subaltern Studies that calls into question the nationalistic narrative the state circulated. On the work of Subaltern Studies see: Dipesh Chakrabaty. *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[7] The new understanding that "the past does not exist independently from the present," and "what we often call the "legacy of the past" may not be anything bequeathed by the past itself" informed the new approaches in rereading the history. See Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Silencing the Past*. Boston, Mass. Beacon Books, 1995.

Ṭarābīshī viewed the recourse towards the Turāth following the 1970s with the most condemning terms, a life-threatening project that breathes life into a "renewed and imagined medieval time." With the beginning of the 1990s, he embarked on a project to debunk Jābirī and his followers, who presented the Turāth as an Arab post-colonial alternative to European parochial modernity.

In March 2004, Ṭarābīshī joined forces with a group of Arab intellectuals who came together to call the Turāth into question, probing its centrality as an alternative model for European prescription. Though many members of this group contested the validity of the Turāth as a cultural model during the 1980s, it took this group more than twenty-years to organize and establish the Arab Rationalist Association (*Rābiṭat al-ʿAqlāniyyin al-ʿArab*,) the first intellectual movement to call attention to the deleterious effects of the Turāth. This group included scholars like the late French-Algerian sociologist Mohammad Arkoun and scholars such as Ḥāmid Abu Zayd and ʿAziz Al-ʿAẓmeh. These scholars examined the cultural assumptions, perspectives and consequences of the "current slide toward the Turāth." They posted questions about the meaning and consequences of the current Arab writing on the Turāth: what are the social and cultural repercussions generated by the recent turn to the Turāth? What world life was sustained in the process of the passionate re-adoption of the Turāth? What was endorsed and secured and what was obliterated and erased in the wake of the collective mania following the Turāth? Mostly comprised of scholars originated in the Mashriq, with its distinctive *nahdawwi* training and habitus, this group was unapologetic in professing European Enlightenment ideas, not the least of which were rationalism, secularism, and liberalism. As we will see, these ideas were articulated against what they conceive as the irrational return to the Turāth, the increased piety, and the emergence of a decidedly authoritarian post-colonial state.

Situating the Arab Rationalist Association in Contemporary Arab Thought

As the big ideologies in the Arab world receded during the 1970s with the demise of Arab socialism, Pan Arabism, and the decline of Marxism, central questions regarding the Arab Left emerged but were never fully answered: where did yesterday's eager Arab Leftists who translated Marxism and established credible publishing houses and disseminated Western theories and vocabularies during the 1940s-1960s go after they had forsworn Marxism? How does one explain their departure and absence?

Did they melt away into the air as one scholar asked?[8] The fact that these questions were rarely pursued by scholars of the Middle East speaks to the constraints of the current historiography of Arab thought. With very few exceptions, [9] these questions went unanswered, for they seem to approve the conventional assumption that the Arab Left is dead, given that many among the previously committed Arab Leftists have either converted to Islam or taken an Islamic turn.[10] While this argument is not entirely inaccurate, it remains partial and dangerous. Partial because it by no means exhausts the magnificent scale and range of the Arab Left, but instead represents a minority which did indeed embrace Islamic epistemologies starting in the 1970s. Dangerous for it sealed the debate on the Arab Left, establishing unsubstantiated assumptions on its sudden disappearance. It is therefore not surprising that the Arab Left in the post-1967 era is commonly seen as an anomaly, a fringe group with diminished power to shape major frames of reference and cultural references. Exceptional works are dedicated to the New Arab Left.[11] The Arab Rationalist Association, particularly because of its adherence to Left ideas and perspectives, is perceived as an aberration.[12]

This dissertation challenges this assumption, arguing that the Arab Rationalist Association attests to Arab Left's expansive and compelling presence and undiluted power in shaping the discourse on

[8] Fadi A. Bardawil, "When All This Revolution Melts into Air: The Disenchantment of Levantine Marxist Intellectuals" (Columbia University, 2010).

[9] Meir Hatina and Christoph Schumann, eds., *Arab Liberal Thought after 1967: Old Dilemmas, New Perceptions*, First edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Samer Frangie, "Theorizing from the Periphery: The Intellectual Project of Mahdi ʿAmil," *International Journal of Middle East Studies; Cambridge* 44, no. 3 (August 2012): 465–82; Hamzah Dyala, "The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, Public Sphere and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood (Hardback) - Routledge," Text, Routledge.com, accessed December 17, 2017; Sune Haugbolle, "The New Arab Left and 1967," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 497–512.

[10] The thesis of secular Arab intellectuals converting to Islam was a forceful argument that was dominant in the 1980s. See: Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam," *Commentary Magazine* (blog), January 1, 1976, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/print-page/; Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010); Meir Hatina, *Ha-Islam Be-Mitsrayim Ha-Modernit: 'iyunim Be-Mishnato Shel Farag' Fudah*, Ḳaṭ Adom (Tel Aviv: ha-Ḳibuts ha-me'uḥad, 2000).

[11] Haugbolle, "The New Arab Left and 1967"; Frangie, "Theorizing from the Periphery"; Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals Andthe Study of Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[12] Joseph Andoni Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Joseph Andoni Massad, "Al-'Irth Al-Mudamir Li-Libiraliyyin Al-ʿArab," Al-Akhbar.com, January 24, 2015. Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (March 20, 2006): 323–47,; Charles Hirschkind, "Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences; Plainfield, Ind.* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 463–77.

freedoms, cultural authenticity, women's rights, democracy and state policies. Rather than declaring the Arab Left dead, I explore the ways they had to adjust and reposition themselves against the turn toward the Turāth, which forced new questions, cultural concerns, and problematics previously unprecedented in Arab thought. With the beginning of the 1970s, as the new field of Turāth studies emerged, the entire intellectual discourse underwent major shifts. Within this new Arab intellectual landscape, which Arab intellectuals refer to as the second *nahḍa*,[13] the Arab Left had to reinvent itself yet again. It is through the Arab Rationalist Association that these questions and assumptions on the absence of the Arab Left are revisited.

Before delving into the debate around the Turāth that led to the creation of the Arab Rationalist Association, the idea of Turāth calls for some clarification to dispel its ambiguity. Curiously, the most controversial idea in contemporary Arab thought remains a blind spot in current scholarship. Even though it has recently garnered some attention, it nonetheless remains a relatively understudied area.[14] One reason for this scholarly negligence is the continuous focus on the *nahḍa* period, when the Turāth was still an embryonic idea that did not play a central role as it would in the post-1967 era. The debate on the Turāth, though began to develop in the post-1967 era, has not been fully pursued by scholars either. The Turāth was studied only as a controversial idea at different conferences during the 1970s and 1980s that confirmed the unbridgeable gap between Islamist and modernist views.[15] These studies only ventured to comment on the Turāth by way of mapping the general trends in Arab thought following the defeat in 1967.[16] Despite the headway made by scholars like Boullata and Kassab in broaching the topic, the Turāth's

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[13] Viewing the post-1967 as a second nahḍa becomes increasingly acceptable in Arabic thought, see: Kamāl Dīb. *Tārīkh Lubnān Al-Thaqāfī: Min ʿaṣr Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Qarn Al-ḥādī Wa-Al-ʿishshrīn* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Sharqīyah, 2016); ʿAbd al-Ilāh Balqazīz. *Nihāyat Al-Dāʿiyah: Al-Mumkin Wa-Al-Mumtaniʿ Fī Adwār Al-Muthaqqafīn*. al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2000).

[14] Two recent dissertations have explored the Turāth as a rising framework in Arab thought, see: Iskandar Mansour, "The Unpredictability of the Past: Turāth and Hermeneutics" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2000); Nadia Wardeh, "The Problematic of Turāth in Contemporary Arab Thought: A Study of Adonis and Hasan Hanafi" (McGill University (Canada), 2008).

[15] Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[16] Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*, SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi. *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London ; Sterling, Va: Pluto Press, 2004).

meaning seems always to evade any definition in their works. These studies often fall short of accounting for the political and cultural effects generated by the Turāth. I propose that the Turāth was fashioned now as a solution to the growing collective despair over the post-colonial condition, an antidote to pressing questions of freedom, authenticity, and belonging. Much of the works that have engaged the Turāth have failed to note that it served as an organizing idea around which different intellectual groups were formed. Nor was the Turāth viewed as an emerging field of study that uniquely represented the Arab world's search for its identity and authenticity. In short, the notion of the Turāth as a unifying field around which intellectual groups were articulated was rarely explored in-depth. The rest of this introduction attempts to distill this idea of the Turāth around which contemporary Arab thought took shape by addressing three issues:

A) The rise of the Turāth to a framework.

B) The cultural responses to the Turath: The rise of the Arab Rationalist Association.

C) The historiography: de-orientalizing the debate.

The Rise of a New Framework: The Establishment of the Turāth Studies

In 1979, the Arab Writers Union in Syria wrested permission from Hafiz Asad to launch a journal entitled *Majalat al-Turāth al-ʿArabī.* It was hardly conceivable that a relatively secular body of scholars that branded itself revolutionary and national in character would establish a journal mainly focused on the interrogations of the Turāth. Only a decade earlier the vast majority of Syrian intellectuals thought ill of the Turāth, smeared it as a site rife with metaphysical thinking and took extra measures to avoid any engagement with it. Not only was the journal not feasible during the "roaring 1960s,"[17] but the idea of Turāth also had little to no appeal at the time. The Turāth, it seemed to many Syrian intellectuals, put at risk the very principles many members of the Arab Writers Union stood for: rationalism, science, secularism, and liberalism. Yet, that numerous writers came to agree on the founding of a journal about the Turāth speaks loudly of the new cultural tastes that permeated Arab literary circles.

[17] I borrow the idea "Roaring 1960s" from Kamal Dīb whose works establish the 1960s as a culture turning point in Arab cultural history where music, art, curation, ideologies, print, translation and architecture were stipulated in Beirut in ways that broke with previous structures. Dīb, *Tārīkh Lubnān Al-Thaqāfī*.

Remarkably, this was not the only journal on the Turāth to spring up during the 1970s in progressive Syria. In the opening editorial of *al-Turāth al-ʿArabī*, ʿAli ʿAqleh ʿIrsān thanks president Hafiz al-Asad for smoothing the way for the creation of this unique journal that bolstered the research of a forgotten Turāth, arguing on behalf of the editorial board that "When we conceived the idea of this journal, we were completely aware of the existence of other journals that are concerned with the Turāth, which played and continue to play significant roles in introducing the Turāth to Arab audiences by lightening its dark corners, most notably the [recently published] journal of *al-Mawrid*. We are also aware of the recently established Turāth Institute at Aleppo University and acknowledge its efforts."[18] Speaking of the new cultural demands for studying the Turāth, the author continued, "We have found, however, that there exists a void that our journal will fill." That void has to do with the dogged biases against the Turāth and the persistent "accusations of some intellectuals (baʿḍ al-muthaqafīn) towards the Turāth," and their unmitigated "suspicion of the significance and value in reconnecting with our Turāth." Despite the marked spike in writings on the Turāth, the author complained that many among the younger generation are growing up "condemning the Turāth without knowing it." Attributing this harsh judgment to young people's compliance with "outdated frameworks," the author pleaded with the younger generation to revise their attitudes toward the Turāth.

The growing preoccupation with the Turāth in Syria was by no means exceptional but in line with other cultural developments in Arab states. A couple of years before *majalat al Turāth* had seen the light in Syria, Iraqi intellectuals were working intensely on the inauguration of a similar journal. In 1977 they launched the journal *Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī al-Islāmī*. It was soon followed by the establishment of Baghdad University's Center of Revival of Arabian Scientific Heritage. In one of its early editorials "How a Nation loses its Character"[19] chief editor Khairallah Ṭalfaḥ spoke of the Turāth as a foundational "pillar" that furnishes indispensable "historical experiences" in a time of uncertainty and tumultuous politics in which the Arab world is wallowing. He wrote that "A nation gains its character" through its "steep

[18] Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-ʿArab, ed., *Al-Turāth Al-ʿArabī* (Damascus: Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-ʿArab, 1979).

[19] Jamʿīyat Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī al-Islāmī (Baghdad, Iraq), ed., *Iḥyā' Al-Turāth Al-ʿArabī Al-Islāmī* (Baghdād: Jamʿīyat Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī al-Islāmī, n.d.).

existence." The author added, "the Arab-Islamic nation [of Iraq] is exposed to a real threat that debilitates its distinctive character," deeming the Turāth a "true treasure," in a society under threat.

Long conceived at the forefront of revolutionary and progressive states, dominated by secular Baʿthist ideology, many assumed that the intellectual class in these countries is particularly insusceptible to reverting to the past. Hardly any one of the Arab elite could have anticipated that the intellectual classes in progressive Iraq and Syria would backslide to the Turāth. Yet, the strong tradition of Nationalism, Arab Socialism and Marxism, which animated this class for decades, could not inoculate it from the Turāth, now seen as a "pillar" and "true treasure" of Arab existence. The same cultural impulses could also be seen at play in other Arab countries. In Egypt, leading intellectuals increasingly engaged the Turāth in their studies, without necessarily giving up on their European ideas.[20] Jordan, a latecomer to Arab intellectualism, launched a Center of Turāth Studies in 1980 in Amman. Even the Cultural Institute of the Arab League established a pan-Arab committee to administer the Turāth maerial and assigned sub-committees to collect dispersed transcripts throughout the Arab world. As one Arab writer remarked at a conference on the Arab Book in 1983, if during the 1960s most publishing houses competed with each other for the publication of translated European ideas, during the 1980s, it was the Turāth and the publication of works related to the Turāth that dominated this industry.[21] The proliferation of Turāth journals signaled the unmaking of previous intellectual debates and the unfolding of new ones. It is within this discourse on the Turāth as a rising cultural problematic that avowed secular scholars like Tunisian writer Lafif Lakhdar would embark on writing the biography of Mohammad (See Chapter 5).

The growing centrality of the Turāth marked the beginning of the age of what many Arab intellectuals call the "return to the roots."[22] This tendency to return to the roots or "the reckoning with the past," was instantly translated by Western writers as a return to Islam, reducing the field of Turāth to

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[20] Ghāli Shukri. *Al-Turāth wal-Thawra* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿah, 1979); Ḥasan Ḥanafī. *Al-Turāth Wa-Al-Tajdīd: Mawqifunā Min Al-Turāth Al-Qadīm*. al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Cairo: al-Markaz al-ʿArabī lil-Baḥth wa-al-Nashr, 1980).

[21] Bashir al-Hashimī, "Wāqiʿ al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī," in *Al-Bayan*, vol.204. March 1983.

[22] Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, ed., *Al-Ḥadāthah Wa-Al-ḥadāthah Al-ʿArabīyah: Muʾtamar Ishhār Al-Muaʾssasah Al-ʿArabīyah Lil-Taḥdīth Al-Fikrī, Muhdá Ilá Idwārd Saʿīd, 30 Nīsān/Ibrīl - 2 Ayyār/Māyū 2004*, al-Ṭabaʿh 1 (Dimashq: Dār Bitrā lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2005). According to Ṭarābīshī it is within the frantic return to the roots that ideas of Asālah, cultural onslaught, and authenticity resonated during the 1970s even if earler iterations of these ideas emerged during the 1940s.

Islam- a phenomenon Arab intellectuals like Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and Ṭarābīshī have strongly contested (see historiography below). Refusing to view the Turāth as merely an expression of Islamic revival, Abu Zayd and Ṭarābīshī conceived of the new engagement with the Turāth as a representation of a new mode of Arab thought that breaks with previous frameworks (nationalism). If during the *nahḍa* the Arab world came to discover modern Europe through a fervent exploration of Western ideas and philosophies,[23] wrote Ṭarābīshī, then during the post-colonial era, the Arab world came to discover their Dhāt or their selfhood which was seen as rooted in their common past, or Turāth. Yet, while the idea of Turāth emerged in the late 19th century, it was only in the post-colonial era that it was politicized. It is precisely during the 1970s that the Turāth was endowed with a new meaning that broke with its earlier genealogy. One of these meanings was expounded by Syrian Marxist Tayib Tizīnī but propounded and popularized by Jābirī. Following Tizīnī, Jābirī argued that the Turāth represents a synchronic time between past and present. It refers to the *relation* contemporary Arabic speakers attach to their past. While modernity fashions linearity, Jābirī argued, the Turāth disrupts the order of this era by facilitating diverse times to co-habit simultaneously.[24] In the absence of a word in English that captures this temporal heterogeneity in a world inhabited by the logic of modernity, which accounts only for empty homogenous time, English speakers might find it challenging to relate to this non-linear time.

To think of the Turāth as time rather than as a static past, a way of seeing rather than memory, and a relation between the present and the past, would better serve the understanding of the current debate in the Arab world. It is for that reason one should avoid forcing a translation on this notion that would lay waste its intellectual energy. Translating Turāth as tradition or past, cultural inheritance or Arab heritage only reduces its attending cultural dynamics and unnecessarily Westernizes the notion. Translation in this case represents a forceful familiarization that many scholars warned against. Talal Asad has recently thought of translation as a way to coopt differences between the East and the West, rather

[23] Ibrahim A. Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe; a Study in Cultural Encounters*, Oriental Studies Series, no. 22 (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1963); Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[24] Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī. *Takwin Al-ʿAql Al-ʿArabi* (Dār al-Ṭalīʿah lil-Ṭibāʿah wa-al-Nashr, 1984), chapter two "Al-Zaman al-Thaqafi".

than making these differences appear. Asad writes that "Translation can be a form of assimilation, but also a mode of "giving over" to a countervailing perspective in an empathic vein." Instead of this mode of intelligibility, which foregrounds Western-capitalist logic, Asad proposes a "different alternative for translation," that emerges "when we are compelled to identify and sustain sites of untranslatability." Asad Writes,

letting the untranslatable situation stand sometimes opens up another field of understanding that serves at least two different purposes: the first is to map incommensurable views without seeking to reconcile them; the second is to see how these very incommensurable domains constitute, inflect, and even suffuse one another without projecting a broader dialectical unity to which they ultimately tend.[25]

Much of the misperceptions and complexity that shroud and attend to the term Turāth stem from the fact that this idea does not lend itself easily to Western-capitalist logic or to articulation in Euro-American languages. That the notion of Turāth resists any easy definition warrants it a genuine "site of untranslatability." For purposes of non-Arabic readers, however, the idea of Turāth could be rendered as a cultural repertoire rather than merely a past that continues to live in the present. One of the advantages of the notion of cultural repertoire is that it never confines itself into time or any specific era. Following Asad's suggestion, this notion will not impose any assimilative translation that might flood the intellectual explanatory of the idea.

The Arab Rationalist Association

The growing deliberations on the Turāth seemed to declare the death knell that sealed the fate of Marxism in the Arab World. In fact, the renewed debate on the Turāth rejuvenated the sluggish Arab Left after they had lost their Marxist identity. The new Arab Left would appropriate the Turāth vocabulary instead of the Marxist jargon, but that deployment didn't mean that the Arab Left turned to Islam. The growing engagement with the Turāth set the groundwork for the new cultural war erupting in the Arab world.

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25 Asad, Talal. *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Kindle Locations 166-170). Fordham University Press. Kindle Edition.

A sense of excitement and anticipation permeated Arab dailies on the morning of March 30, 2004, when a remarkable assembly of Arab intellectuals flocked to Beirut for a three-day conference. Invitees traveled from Paris, London and Berlin to celebrate the official inauguration of the *Arab Institute for Modern Thought* (*Muʾtamar Ishhār al-Muaʾssasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Taḥdīth al-Fikrī*), later the Arab Rationalist Association. When self-exiled Arab intellectuals paid a visit from the *mahjar* (diaspora) they often grabbed media attention. The public mood was high as the many media outlets passionately covered star-intellectuals like Mohammad Arkoun, Adūnīs, Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, Nasr Ḥamid Abu Zayd, Hāshim Sāleḥ, ʿAziz al-ʿAzmeh, Lafif Lakhdar and Fatḥi Ben Salama as they walked out of Hariri International Airport in Beirut. Coming from European capitals, they joined a group of local intellectuals with whom they constitute the core of this movement: Ṣāḍiq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm, ʿAbed al-Majīd Shurafī, Mohammad Houni, Saʿid Nāshīd, Rajāʿ Ben Salama, Mohammad Ḥadād, and Shākir Nābulsī. More than one hundred thirty intellectuals, carefully selected, attended the conference to mark the beginning of the official activity of this anti-Turāth movement. Though the number of attendees was described as "outstanding," it was the identity of the invitees and organizers that stirred most of the commotion that inspired Arab media and journals. Many have wondered at the conspicuous absence of noticeable Egyptian, Jordanian, and Palestinian intellectuals. One journalist marveled at why the organizers extended an invitation only to one Egyptian intellectual- the self-declared secularist Sayyid al-Qimni?[26]

That these anti-Turāth, secular critics have suffered from invisibility for decades partly explains the fanfare with which they carried out the event in Beirut. Intent on showcasing their presence and core ideas, this 'secular club' invited a great many local journalists, writers, feminists, artists and cultural critics, a far more significant share than the current literature on the Middle East is willing to concede. As befitting such a remarkable occasion, the gathering took place in Le Bristol Hotel with its spacious meeting

[26] Fatima Hafiz, "Arab Rationalist Association: An Attempt in Deconstructing Religion and Ethics," IslamOnline, March 4, 2013, http://islamonline.net/2052. On Qimni's mocking of Islamists in Egypt see in particular his "Shurkan-Bin Laden" (Gratitude to Ben Laden) in which he derides and taunts 'moderate' Islamists whose true face Bin Laden exposed to all: see *Shukran-- Bin Lādin!!* Dār Miṣr al-Maḥrūsah, 2004

halls in the heart of Beirut's business center. For the *Institute's* members, it was crucial to hold and affirm the role Beirut had played during the *nahḍa* as the seedbed of secular impulse in the Middle East.[27]

The Genealogy of the Institute

The idea of the *Institute* was conceived and developed in the late 1990s by expatriate Arab intellectuals. Disenchanted with what they deemed "the return to the Turāth" in their countries of origin, many of these displaced intellectuals wanted to take action to reverse the tide towards the Turāth. Numerous Arab intellectuals lived in Europe's capitals at the turn of the new millennium, especially in the wake of the fifteen-year civil war in Lebanon that gutted Beirut and sent many off its shores. In the Netherlands, exiled intellectual Hamid Abu Zayd lived off a teaching grant in Leiden. In London, a great many Arab intellectuals and poets thrived since the mid-twentieth century, giving rise to original Arab journals and publishing houses that emerged during the late 1970s.[28] In Paris, a plethora of Arab intellectuals had been integrated into the Parisian intellectual scene since at least the 1930s. A remarkable figure of these Arab intellectuals was Mohammad Arkoun, a professor of Islamic thought at Paris University and a French-Algerian author well-known for his vehement criticism of political Islam. Arkoun established a non-formal group, a "Parisian Circle"[29] of Arab students. According to Ṣāḍiq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm, Arkoun was impatient to have his French writings translated into Arabic, so he "cultivated a circle of students," key among them Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, Hāshim Sāleḥ, Lafif Lakhdar and Fatḥi Ben Salama.

The rapid change in the global circumstances at the turn of the millennium breathed new life into the idea of the *Parisian Circle*. The events of September 11, 2001, left many Arab Leftists confused and confounded at the scale and scope of the human damage a group of Islamists could inflict. The need to counteract and criticize the use and abuse of the Turāth took on an unprecedented urgency. One of the

[27] If other cities in the Middle East, particularly Dubai and Abu Dabi, increasingly lured in conservative publishing industry, Beirut remained the city of choice of the secular club. Many among the *Institute's* intellectuals attached vast importance to cities as hubs of creativity. They could not hide their condescendence toward rural dwellers and villagers who flooded the big cities at the mid-century. The fall of Beirut into a fifteen-year civil war depilated the city as a social and cultural milieu that for a century provided a mechanism for transmission of knowledge and ideas. Launching the *Institute* in Beirut can be seen as an attempt to awaken the ideals this city stood for in the late nineteenth century.

[28] On the establishment of dominant Arabic publishing industry in London since mid-century, see: Riyāḍ Najīb Rayyis, *Ākhir Al-Khawārij: Ashyā' Min Sīrah ṣiḥāfīyah*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 2004).

[29] I refer here to the expression that Ṣāḍiq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm used in an interview I had with him in May 2015.

distressed Arab writers, dizzied by the consequences of the events that have cascaded throughout the world, was Mohammad Ibn ʿAbid al-Muṭalib al-Houni, an unknown Libyan businessman based in Italy. Houni burst onto the intellectual scene out of nowhere. Yet, his plunge into the Arab intellectual domain was remarkable. He proposed to bring the Parisian Circle to the public sphere.[30]

Little was known of the man or his operations. Like many among the obscure Arab entrepreneurial class who make money in savory and unsavory ways, Houni was quite an unfamiliar face before offering to establish the *Institution*. He was an affluent man who made his fortune facilitating Libyan oil to Italy under Gadhafi for three decades. He described himself as an autodidact whose education was immensely in debt to the newly translated works of Mohammad Arkoun. Reading Arkoun's writings, Houni testified, infused excitement and eagerness in pursuing such a cultural project. Houni, however, was not a regular reader of Arkoun. He was an able man bent on making change in this world. With his meddling, the *Parisian Circle* was transformed into the *Institute*, materializing otherwise ideal talks by disenfranchised intellectuals.[31]

Houni was a staunch believer in the agenda of the *Institute*. His ideas reflected the core values that held the *Institute* together. The challenges that stand ahead of Arab societies, Houni asserted, come down from its culture rather than from its political system. Emphasizing the power of culture to shape Arab peoples' behavior, Houni argued that it is the ethical and moral architecture, belief system, and values that clamor for a revision rather than the authoritarian or despotic regimes. For Houni this cultural challenge entails not only rethinking the historical narrative Arab peoples repeat to themselves, but also questioning the very national ethos and religious codes deeply entrenched in the Turāth. Houni intuitively realized that to buck the trend of the Turāth he needed to challenge the parameters and truths of the dominant narrative. In his keynote speech, which ushered in the *Institute* in Beirut, Houni remarks:

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[30] He donated $1 million as the first installment for the creation of this group. On the donations of this group see: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, ed., *Al-Ḥadāthah Wa-Al-ḥadāthah Al-ʿArabīyah: Muʾtamar Ishhār Al-Muaʿssasah Al-ʿArabīyah Lil-Taḥdīth Al-Fikrī, Muhdá Ilá Idwārd Saʿīd, 30 Nīsān/Ibrīl - 2 Ayyār/Māyū 2004*, al-Ṭabaʿh 1 (Dimascus: Dār Bitrā lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2005).

[31] Houni lived in Rome for more than three decades. Enchanted by Italian Renaissance, especially Italian Arts, he purchased a 17th century estate outside of Rome. Italy provided not only new business opportunities for the Libyan businessman, but mainly afforded him a unique vantage point to observe events on the southern flank of the Mediterranean basin. Watching the turbulence rattling the Middle East from the safety of his suburban mansion instilled in Houni new illuminations.

"Until recently it was widely held that the regression from which Arab societies suffer is of technical, industrial, and developmental quality in the first place. A regression linked to corruption and political despotism. But today, in light of the defeats and the threat of the traumatic regression that is shaping up to a true catastrophe, we find that that regression has an intellectual and cultural quality. This is to say that the Arab body is not ill in its ends, but that illness has gotten hold of its brain… A short while ago we talked about Arab's disability that obstructs us from accessing modernity, but today we suffer [from] a sheer Arab refusal of modernity."[32]

The meeting at La Bristol marked a significant milestone in the annals of Arab thought. It marked the peak of the cultural war on the Turāth that has been waged since Jābirī first published his dissertation. Yet, less than thirty months had to pass before the *Institute* dissolved into factions as the diverging ideas among its co-founders Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and Jūrj Ṭarābīshī on the place of Turāth grew unbridgeable. In its place, the Arab Rationalist Association was formally declared in Paris with none of the previous carnivals attending. Though the Association is a natural continuation of the *Institute*, it signaled a sharp turn away from Turāth, as will be made clear throughout the rest of this dissertation.

The Historiography

The main ambition of this dissertation is to fill the staggering gap in the current historiography regarding the Turāth. Despite the hundreds of Arabic books, conferences and heated debates on the Turāth since the 1970s, there is still an abject dearth in scholarship that appropriately address the topic. In fact, the absence of writings on the Turāth led to great confusion, reduction, and misrepresentations, which persistently plague many scholarly works on Arab thought. For example, Arab intellectuals' growing immersion in the Turāth was instantly conceived as a breach with Western epistemologies and ideologies, stalling a process that earlier generations initiated.[33] That shift gave rise to what I call here the "stagnation model." According to this model, the Arab Left is stagnant and Arab secularism is dead or at least on the

[32] Ibid., 30-31.
[33] Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "Retreat from the Secular Path? Islamic Dilemmas of Arab Politics," *The Review of Politics* 28, no. 4 (1966): 447–76.

ropes. Triumphant a half-century ago, when national regimes appeared to have prevailed definitively over the conservative and austere Islamists, it is now under siege from within and from without. Plenty of works on contemporary Arab thought comport, in one way or another, with this model. Its logic lies in dividing the history of the Middle East during the twentieth-century into two major periods with two distinctive ideologies or dominant epistemologies. According to this model, a nationalist ideology dominated the first half of the twentieth century; Islamic ideology replaced the model in the second half of the century.[34]

This historiography viewed the war of 1967 as a tipping point where one ideology (Islamism or political Islam) superseded the other (Left, secular and nationalism). Scholars as well as journalists and political pundits took this model to be true. One journalist noted, "Following the 1967 war with Israel in which Arab forces suffered a humiliating defeat, Arab nationalism went into decline- along with secularist ideas that had often accompanied it. Inevitably, some [Arabic speakers] saw military defeat as a punishment from God, wreaking upon Muslims for deviating from the righteous path."[35] Meanwhile, as Arab writers' debates on the Turāth went along unrecognized and invisible, all commentaries on the Turāth were haphazardly viewed as no more than a return of Islam.[36] In the Arab speaking world, Islam did not return but morphed and adopted a new shape. The prevalent modes of Islamic religiosity in the post-1967 era increasingly emphasized religious rituals (veils and beards) and the role of institutions (by building mosques and other Associations). As Ernest Gellner argued the new Islam of the cities became increasingly legalistic.[37]

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[34] Many Middle Eastern historians subscribe to this model: see Michaelle Browers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World: Accommodation and Transformation*, Cambridge Middle East Studies, 31 (Leiden: Cambridge University Press, 2009); R. Stephen Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubledage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Meir Hatina and Christoph Schumann, eds., *Arab Liberal Thought after 1967: Old Dilemmas, New Perceptions*, First edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[35] Brian Whitaker, *Arabs Without God*, 1 edition (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 49.

[36] One of the authors who translated the re-emergence of the cultural Turath to mere "return of Islam" is Bernard Lewis. See: Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam," *Commentary Magazine*, January 1, 1976.

[37] Sami Zubaida, 1995 "Is There a Muslim Society? Ernest Gellner's Sociology of Islam," In *Economy and Society* 24 (2): 43-58.

This dissertation argues that the advent of the Turāth studies in the Arab world is a sign not so much of a return of Islam as a clear mark of the emergence of a new field that shaped new ways of seeing and tasting. This transformation in intellectual aesthetics gave rise to newfound cultural references that began eating away at the dominant conversations of the dominated Arab intellectual circles during the 1950s-60s. This new development has less to do with the West so much as with the new conditions of the post-colonial affairs. Yet, the establishment of the Turāth went along unacknowledged most likely because of a failure of translatability. In the absence of a corresponding term that captured the meaning of Turāth, Arabs' genuine interest in their Turāth was translated as a turn to Islam, especially because Islam is part of Turāth. How did this happen?

From the early 1980s, the Arab Left was narrated as the one and ultimate class of intellectuals that was defeat. This conception was essential to writing out the debate on the Turāth. In a famous article in the New Republic entitled "*The Impossible Life of Moslem Liberalism*," Fouad Ajami reaffirms the stagnation model by speaking of the death of liberalism, the Arab Left and secular thinking in the Middle East. He declares that "in one Moslem society after another, to write of liberalism…is to write obituaries of men who took on impossible odds, and then failed."[38] Ajami architected a theory of the passing of the secular age from the Arab world. In *The Arab Predicament*, one of his well read books, Ajami gave voice to this thesis of a short-lived secular experiment and liberal thought in the Arab world, writing "An era in Arab politics had ended, and the struggle for the shape of the Arab order had begun" "Yesterday's radicals- the Baʿth Party and President Nasser- were the principal victims of the defeat."[39] In the *Dream of the Arab Palace* he reiterated the same idea, writing that "the young had taken to theocratic politics; they had broken with the secular politics of their elders."[40] Two generations, two modes of being: the former is inherently secular, the latter is religious.

Ajami was not alone in upholding and propounding the stagnation model but was one of its incisive progenitors. Other judgments were unambiguously condemning in asserting the passing of Arab Left and

[38] Quoted by Kurzman, *Liberal Islam*, 12.
[39] Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, 30.
[40] Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs*, 7.

Western ideologies from the Arab world. In the article, "Partisans of the Heritage," which discusses the shifts in modes of Arab thought, Alexander Flores argues that "many political thinkers throughout the Arab East who used to hold secularist views now subscribe to political Islam."[41] Though the title promises to account for the return to the Turāth as signified by the word heritage, Flores could not set himself free from the duality between secularism and Islam. He immediately assumed the prevailing and overriding thesis of the return to Islam that excludes any other possibility to account for changes in Arab thought, other than a shift toward Islam or against it.

Yet others presumed that secularism and the Arab Left in the Arab world, particularly in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, was steadily losing ground. In "Retreat from secularism in Arab nationalist and socialist thought," Michaelle Browers furnishes an account in which yesterday's seculars relinquish their Western-originated philosophies. She writes that "Arab nationalist and socialist intellectuals began to find meeting points and to develop a shared language with Islamists."[42] Others ruled out any possibility of secularism in the Muslim societies whatsoever.[43] In this context the unusual statement made by the anthropologist and theorist of social studies, Ernest Gellner, is remarkable: "no secularization has taken place in the world of Islam."[44] Gellner grew accustomed to seeing the secular develop against the religious and could not think of Arab secularism as developing in opposition to Turāth, rather than against Islam.

These arguments notwithstanding, no other scholar has methodologically affirmed the duality of Arab historical experience with secular modernity as Bernard Lewis. If most of the surveyed literature underlined the theme of 'passing' and 'death' of the Arab Left as the standard-carriers of the secular and liberal forms in the Arab world, Lewis gives the stagnation model its most coherent form. In *What Went Wrong*, he argued that secularism, cultural change, or liberalism had failed miserably in Islamic society because *"the idea that any group of persons, any kind of activities, any part of human life is in any sense*

[41] Alexander Flores, "Egypt: A New Secularism?," *Middle East Report*, no. 153 (1988): 27–30.
[42] Browers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World*, 30.
[43] Donald Eugene Smith. *India as a Secular State* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1963), 40. Donald Smith suggests that Islamic societies are hostile to secular culture.
[44] Ernest Gellner, "Islam and Marxism: Some Comparisons," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 67, no. 1 (1991): 1–6, https://doi.org/10.2307/2621215.

outside the scope of religious law and jurisdiction is alien to Muslim thought."[45] In his vast writings on the Middle East, Lewis rarely mentioned the idea of Turāth. In fact, he made up for the glaring absence of the Turāth by wantonly speaking of Islam.

The secular logic through which much of the historiography on the Middle East is written precludes many historians from seeing the Turāth as a primary field of debate among Arab intellectuals. The secular logic accounts for everything social or cultural as religious or secular. This secular view emphasizes the spike in the number of mosques in the Middle East since the 1970s, while ignoring the number of schools, for instance. In particular, this secular oriented scholarship emphasizes the increase of veiled women in the Arab world, a phenomenon which is interpreted uncritically as a return to Islam. The veil, for example, was never referred to as a cultural symbol or expression of authenticity. Ironically, religious symbols in Europe were narrated differently. When the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights "ruled in 2001 … that the crucifix was a *cultural symbol* that represented the identity of 'Italian civilization' and its 'value system of liberty, equality, human dignity and religious toleration,'"[46] no one asked why the veil continues to signal the return to Islam.[47]

Very few events in contemporary Arab thought, so vital to our nuanced understanding of the continuities and shifts within the Arab intellectual community, have been as baffling as the re-appearance of the Turāth. Yet, the return of the Turāth meant to reaffirm yet again the ubiquitous rise of Islam or Islamic literature. The idea of *Turāth* not only has no parallels in western languages, but has remained incomprehensible to many sharp minds writing about the Middle East. Rarely, if ever, was the advent of the Turāth interpreted as the rediscovery of the cultural repertiore that gave rise to a renewed interest in Arab classic poetry, Arab philosophy, songs, Art, and architecture. More often it was conceived as a triumph of the thesis of the Islamic revival. In the 1970s, as the field of Turāth studies expanded, as more

[45] Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford [England] ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 100.
[46] Cited by Scott, Joan Wallach. Sex and Secularism (The Public Square) (pp. 18-19). Princeton University Press. Kindle Edition.
[47] The Supreme Administrative Court in Italy which took the case first argued that "the crucifix did not have any religious connotation in Italy. Instead, it symbolized Italy's historical and cultural value, which may have had religious origins in the past but did not anymore." see Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Sovereignty, and Religious Difference: A Global Genealogy?," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 2 (April 1, 2017): 197–209.

and more Arab writers and intellectuals disavowed Marxism and turned to explore their relation to the Turāth, a veteran historian of the Middle East, Charles Issawi, wrote "No observer of present trends in the Arab world can fail to be impressed by the strength of its revulsion against Western political and economic values and ideologies."[48] For Issawi that "revulsion" pervaded all aspects of Arab life without regard to class, society, gender or education, since it was a "question of a whole society turning against an alien civilization."[49] Issawi could not appreciate that what was sweeping Arab society was not a revulsion against Western values but an effervescent desire to belong in an age of increasing globalization.

At a time when Arab scholars began fervently engaging Medieval literature, probing the boundaries and meaning of the Turāth, their cultural efforts were rarely understood. In 1980, a scholar of Arab societies observed that "A visitor to the Arab world cannot but note the intensification of *Islamic identity* that has taken place in the past several years. The Islamic nature of the area is apparent in the flood of *conservative religious literature* in the bookstores of Egypt."[50]

While there is little doubt that religious literature has gained appeal in recent decades, the fact that the author felt uncompelled to provide details on the nature of this "religious literature," clearly speaks to the assumptions that guide many scholars who write on the current debates among Arab intellectuals. Subsuming the vast literature and debate on the Turāth under "conservative religious literature" affirms the view of the Islamic resurgence while precluding alternative ways to account for the debates among Arab intellectuals. Haddad seems too indifferent to a critical understanding of the secular and the religious. In particular, one should ask, what happens when the boundaries that separate religious literature from the secular become meaningless and increasingly porous? How do we determine whether a discourse or action is "religious" or "secular"? Still, it is intriguing that the post-1967 era was described as a period of "intensified Islamic identity," ruling out Arabs' genuine struggles with their Turāth and with authenticity.

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[48] Charles Philip Issawi, *The Arab World's Legacy: Essays* (Princeton, N.J: Darwin Press, 1981), 231.
[49] Issawi, 231. By alien he meant Western.
[50] Yvonne Haddad, "The Arab-Israeli Wars, Nasserism, and the Affirmation of Islamic Identity," in John L. Esposito and Hossein Askari, eds., *Islam and Development: Religion and Sociopolitical Change*, 1st ed, Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 107.

While the historiography that placed Islamic resurgence at the forefront of the Middle East has expanded the horizons of our understanding of the Arab peoples, it nonetheless limits our understanding of the fundamental development of the Turāth question. Even if the "religious literature" is verifiable to some extent, it has simply eliminated, and made unthinkable, all other alternatives to it, to borrow Edward Said's words from another context. This historiography mobilized the entire system of representation while excluding the possibility of the return to the Turāth in a society seeking to lead a more authentic life. The Turāth was rarely portrayed as a topic around which Arab intellectual opinions diverged and articulated. Instead, it is still Islam that is being deployed as the main battlefield upon which cultural wars are being fought. The gap between this Western historiography of Arab thought and the ideas which Arab intellectuals are genuinely debating has been growing over the years. This dissertation locates itself in the yawning gap between Arab intellectuals' discourse and Western scholars' representations of Arab thought.

Why did the current historiography on the Middle East suffer from such a pitfall? Each field of study suffers from constitutive absences and silences which make legible what the field agents deem significant. The marginalization and systematic suppression of the Turāth is foundational in giving rise to the dominant view of the (re)turn to Islam or the increase in religious literature, without which it would be hard to make this theory coherent. No doubt the "return of Islam" offered to account for many political, social, and economic events of the last few decades. Yet examining Middle Eastern societies solely through the lens of this model ignores vast spaces of human activity. This model only captures a fragment of the reality that is neither absolute nor generalizable. In other words, though the current scholarship on Arab thought had created new areas of research, these discoveries also generated new domains of ignorance in Arab thought. When the idea of "Islam" is brought to the center, the idea of Turāth is suspended.

Another reason for the many pitfalls in scholarship on the Turāth was the persistent exclusion of the recent intellectual development in North Africa, which contributed considerably to the rise of the Turāth as a field of study. With only few exceptions, the prominent scholarship on Arab thought continues to follow the framework of the liberal age of the *nahḍa*. The recent attempts to go "beyond the liberal age" have met with partial success, for it is impossible to expand on the *nahḍa* framework so long as North

African intellectuals are muted or excluded. Despite their claim to write a revised history beyond the liberal age, Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss' recent work committed this fallacy. Of the almost three dozen articles they put together, only two articles addressed the North African intellectual landscape while only one addressed the question of Turāth. The vast majority of the articles focused on the geography of the *nahḍa* of the eastern Mediterranean: Beirut, Cairo and all that lies between. Though Hanssen and Weiss offer an earnest revision of Arab thought, they reaffirm the geography of the *nahḍa* where Beirut and Cairo are viewed as the center and Morocco and Algeria the periphery. More than twenty articles focused merely on Egypt and the Levant, re-establishing the same geographies that Albert Hourani institutionalized half a century ago.[51] It is through marginalizing North Africa and its vibrant intellectual scene that the field of Turāth evades scholarly attention and remains invisible. Hanssen and Weiss reinforce their assumption in the introduction of the second volume by claiming that, "After the Cold War and the end of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1989), the *nahḍa* reemerged as a theme in wider Arabic public discourse." Resorting to the *nahḍa*, they rationalize, emerged from the narrowing of freedoms in the Arab world. "As the space for critical thinking appeared to shrink in this atmosphere of economic, political and religious violence… leftist intellectuals 'began to invoke the *nahḍa* as an emblem and a shield."[52]

One has to immediately ask whether the renewed interest in the *nahḍa* was a cause or a result of something else, much broader that rekindled intellectual debates in those years- namely the engagement with the Turath. As this dissertation demonstrates, the Arab Left, reflected in the Arab Rationalist Association, invoked the *nahḍa* primarily to fend against the return to the Turāth. Branding the *nahḍa* as the recent past, the members of the Association called to deploy and appropriate its spirit to stave off the drift toward the far past of medieval Islam. Ironically, many members of the Arab Left in the Association had criticized the *nahḍa* before the 1970s, and they now seemed to embrace it as a means to disarm the forces of the Turāth. As I show in chapter four, "From Revolution to *nahḍa*," Arab intellectuals resorted to the *nahḍa* in the context of disputing the Turāth as an alternative trajectory to Arab modernity.

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[51] Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[52] Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought against the Authoritarian Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). Introduction

Chapters' Outlines

"Just as the modern West drew and continues to draw on its last five centuries of experiences and traditions, on its Renaissance, Enlightenment, and liberal thought, Muslims nowadays are challenging this traditional narrative and are increasingly developing their own history—as a discursive moral practice—in such a way as to provide a source of their own. This is not to say that any of their major discourses calls for the restoration of the Sharīʿa in its traditional form, in its traditional institutions, practices, and hermeneutical conceptions of life, for all these, as anyone can see, have vanished without hope of return. But it does mean that Muslims still find in their history—just as the West finds in the Enlightenment—a resource on which they can capitalize while facing the challenges of the modern project, a project that has proved incapable of solving even those problems of its own making."[53]

In this quote, Columbia professor of Islamic law, Wael Hallaq, provides an essential point of entry to the study of the Turāth. Hallaq rightly insists on the undeniable cultural demand of post-colonial Arabic speakers to restore their "own history," which could "provide a [moral] source of their own." However, it remains unclear why Hallaq limits this "history" and "moral sources" to the Sharīʿa only, which constitutes only one aspect, albeit a significant one, of the broader cultural repertoire of the Turāth. Despite the fact that he reduced the Turāth to Sharīʿa, Hallaq's ideas are crucial to my argument about the Turāth. He calls upon students of this region to heed to something that takes shape in the horizon against the failures of the nation state. That thing is the Turāth that emerged within the discourse on Asālah (authenticity) and Ghazū Fikri (cultural colonialism/onslaught).

What makes the Turāth a stand-alone scholarly field of study is discussed at length in each chapter of this work. Chapter one "*Countering the Turāth: The Rise of the Arab Rationalist Association"* introduces the controversy between so called Turāthiyyin (the partisan of the Turāth) and the anti-Turāth intellectuals around the idea of the secular. Though the debate focuses on the Western idea of the secular, the background of the debate is based on the new politics of the Turāth, which split the Arab Left into different groups. Chapter Two, *The Emergence of a New Field*, elaborates on the generalization and spike

[53] Wael B. Hallaq. *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*, Kindle edition (Columbia University Press, 2012), 12–13.

of the writing on the Turāth and contextualizes its emergence at the beginning of the 1970s against the apparent failure of the post-colonial nation state and the cultural projects it made possible: Nasserism, Socialism, and Islamic reformism.[54] The establishment of Turāth studies as a relatively autonomous field, from which secular sensibilities emerged, was one response to these devastating experiments. After establishing the thesis on the Turāth, this dissertation transitions to account for the voices that vehemently opposed the trend of the Turāth in contemporary Arab thought.

My journey in chapters three and four starts with the great, brutal culling of the defeat in 1967 and the loss and cultural disorientation that settled in the Arab world following the 1967 war, which brought along a new disenchanting perspective to the world. Chapters three and four zoom into the life of Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, one of the most productive writers in the Arab world since the late 1960s. Ṭarābīshī had his moment of "rediscovery of the Turāth," which signaled a turning point in his intellectual trajectory. Chapter three narrates the life anf thought that made up the young Ṭarābīshī, the revolutionist, Existentialist, and Marxist. The second Ṭarābīshī is presented in chapter four as an anti-Turathist, secular, and the representative of the Arab Rationalist Association.

Chapters Five and Six account for two other members of the Arab Rationalist Association. Lafif Lakhdar, the Tunisian writer and a sworn secular who lived most of his life displaced between Tunisia, Algeria, Beirut, Amman, and Paris, offers a thorough analysis of the Turāth as a memory that nullifies history. His membership in the Arab Rationalist Association endowed this group with its secular title. The battle in which he envisioned himself engaging is no longer for discrediting the foundational text, as his earlier Marxist abortive attempt proved in the 1960s; nor is it for legitimizing different heuristic means to address the arcane language for the collective good. Rather, he wished to establish a different set of epistemological protocols that dispose with uncritical, traditional thinking that blocks different possibilities of readings and behavior. As I will discuss in more detail, Lakhdar would make genuine psychological use of the Qur'ān to discard some verses that "straddle the 21st century Muslim with an overwhelming sense of guilt."

[54] On the failure of these experiments, see Sami Zubaida where he argues that the failure of the "secularization process" in the Middle East turned religion to a matter of politics. See: Zubaida, "Islam and Secularization."

The last chapter looks at the younger generation of the Arab Rationalist Association. Focusing on the radical sensibilities the younger generation embraced, this chapter accounts for Tunisian Rajaʾ Ben Slāma's criticism of the Turāth. When Ben Slāma opened her eyes to the climate of ideas, many intellectuals in the Arab world began revising their previous, negative attitude toward the Turāth. Born in 1968, Slāma espoused a discourse that despises politics and fully trusts the power of ideas to bring about change. If her countryman and member of the Association, Lafif Lakhdar claimed that the current wars in the Middle East revolve around shaping Arab collective memory of its iconic figures, then Slāma insists that the essence of the battle comes down to shaping ideas about the Turāth. Thus, for Slāma, intellectuals, rather than politicians, are the new engineers of society. On their shoulders falls the sheer responsibility for forging alternative narratives, coining new terminology, and writing a new history to re-imagine the Turāth, which traditional and conservatives dominated for centuries. The raging confrontations in many Arab societies, Slāma maintains, boil down to a battle of ideas, assumptions, and cultural orientations, which all masquerade in a political veneer. At their core, however, they are intellectual rivalries. Slāma speaks from a unique positionality. Unlike many among the previous generation of intellectuals, Slāma insists that reforming Islam in fact reins in change, and impedes the true transformation of cultural attitudes. Rather than reform, she calls for forging a new history to regulate the relationship between the present and past.

At a time when secular Arab national movements began receding in the post-1967 era, many scholars argue that Arab intellectuals faced the tribulations of the post-colonial state by embracing Islam. While few ex-Marxists did look to Islam, the vast majority turned to explore the Turāth, launching a new field of studies that restructured what it means to be a member of the Arab Left and redefined what it means to be a progressive in the Arab world today. It is through the Turāth frenzy that one can approach these questions, long dismissed as resolved and inconsequential. Drawing on the original works of Arab intellectuals' writings, memoirs, and interviews, this dissertation ultimately argues that only when historians of the Middle East bracket their assumptions on "Islam" are new insights toward an enriched understanding of Arab intellectual debates made thinkable and legible.

CHAPTER I: COUNTERING THE TURĀTH: THE RISE OF THE ARAB RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION

Abstract

The Turāth has been central to Islamic societies in the Middle East for over a millennium. It provides the values, beliefs, and guidelines for conduct that help forge Arab communities into organic wholes. A crucial force that tied one generation to the next, the Turāth had been waning since the nineteenth century with the sweep of modernity and the integration of the Middle East in the global capital market that installed new modes of communalities. Over the last three decades of the twentieth-century, however, there was a sudden return to the Turāth among Arab intellectuals which demonstrated that it has never been a dead tradition. It lived on in the nooks and crannies of modern life, and though it receded from the public sphere, it existed on the private level. In the wake of the new turn toward the Turāth, the Arab intellectual landscape witnessed a shocking earthquake that shattered the Left camp into smaller units, changing the definition of what it means to be progressive in the Arab world today.

Introduction

In Spring 1989, the French based, Arabic journal, *al-Yaūm al-Sābiʿ* embarked on a series of debates between two celebrated intellectuals: the Moroccan scholar Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī (1935-2010) and the Egyptian philosopher Ḥassan Ḥanafī (1935.) Circulating for over ten weeks under the title *Ḥiwār al-Mashriq wal-Maghrib*, the series covered ten hotly-debated topics.[55] While Jābirī represented the *Maghrib* in this dialogue, Ḥanafī represented the *Mashriq*, since Egypt was--and still is--considered part of the *Mashriq*.[56] The debate drew much attention and outstanding public interest, propelling once indifferent TV networks to engage intellectuals in interviews and shows that resulted in the shaping of 'star' Arab

[55] The debate was later published in a book. See: Ḥasan Ḥanafī and Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī. *Ḥiwār Al-Mashriq Wa-Al-Maghrib: Talīhi Silsilat Al-Rudūd Wa-Al-Munāqashāt*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1990). The topics were: on Dialogue, Fundamentalism, Secularism, Arab Unity, Liberalism, Modernism, Nasserism, Dialogue Revised, Arabs and the French Revolution, the Palestinian Question.

[56] The extensive intellectual exchanges between Egypt and the Levant unified these two spheres into what Khuri-Makdisi called "geography of contestation." See Ilham Khuri-Makdisi. *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914*. The California World History Library 13 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

intellectuals.[57] The weekly reactions following each debate brought to the open pent up disagreements not only among individual intellectuals on the Left, but also among journals and publishing houses.

The scale and extent of written and oral reactions to these debates attests to their extraordinary significance among Arab intellectuals, so much so that some have referred to this phenomenon as the "Dialogue of the Eighties" (*Ḥiwār al-Thamanīnāt*).[58] A couple of years later, the editor of *al-Yaūm al-Sābiʿ*, Fayṣal Jalloūl conceded that the rash of commentary in the form of books, articles, lectures and interviews had "exceedingly surpassed our expectation" and for that reason many have "named it" the most important "cultural event" (*ḥadath thaqāfī*) of this era.[59]

One of the topics that sparked much commotion was, predictably, secularism, the subject of the third debate.[60] The secular idea had grown more contentious during the 1980s, as many Arab Marxists who had renounced Marxism adopted a secular identity. Yet, it was intriguing that both of the Leftist debaters, whose critical writings against Islamists qualified them as progressives, deemed the secular question in the contemporary Arab world a "spurious question" (*masʾlah muzayyafah*) and unanimously called to "pull out the secular slogan [*sic*] from Arabic dictionaries," given the complexity and ambiguity that shrouds the term. The true cultural demand, they proclaimed, is democracy and human rights rather than secularism.[61]

Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī and Ḥassan Ḥanafī's backing away from secularism signaled a radical move in the Arab Left, an act that jolted many of these progressives out of their complacency. The Arab Left (a hodgepodge of Marxists, nationalists, communists and liberals) had previously fashioned itself the predominant revolutionary party in Arab politics and viewed itself as inherently secular, forward looking, anti-past and anti-religion.[62] Despite the fact that Arab secularism was still a nebulous idea, it nonetheless

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[57] On the transition of Arab intellectuals to screens in the late 1980s after Najīb Maḥfouz's Nobel Prize, see: Franck Mermier and Firidrīk Maʿtūq, eds., *al-Faḍāʾ al-ʿArabī: al-faḍāʾīyāt wa-al-intirnit wa-al-iʿlān wa-al-nashr*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Damascus: Qadmus lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2003), 477–479.

[58] Ḥanafī and Jābirī, *Ḥiwār Al-Mashriq Wa-Al-Maghrib*, 14.

[59] Ḥanafī and Jābirī, 12–15.

[60] "Al-ʿIlmaniyya wal-Islam," in, *Ḥiwār*. 71–83.

[61] Ibid. p. 77.

[62] Hisham Sharabi, "Cultural Critics of Contemporary Arab Society," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1987): 1–19; Issa J. Boullata. *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*. SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

unified the Left as an organic whole and pitted them against Islamists. Yet, the denunciation of the secular idea by two notable progressive intellectuals set the course for the beginning of an intellectual backlash at the end of which a new group, the *Arab Rationalist Association*, emerged, heralding the establishment of a new brand of Arab progressivism.

While repudiating secularism was instantly viewed (by Western scholars) as a proof of Arab intellectuals' "retreat from secularism"[63] or "the return to Islam,"[64] I show, in what follows, that this repudiation was a more complex and subtle development that defied these simplistic descriptions. Instead, I locate the new revisionism among Arab intellectuals in the context of the growing debate on Turāth in the post-colonial age, where ideas like cultural authenticity gained more popularity and currency. Remarkably, while Jābirī and Ḥanafī disavowed secularism, they by no means ruled out other western ideals, notably democracy and human rights.[65] Their rebuttal of the secular idea has less to do with the West as it does with their opposition to the intellectual frameworks originated in the *Mashriq*. As the Arab world entered the age of authenticity, Jābirī and Ḥanafī's reservations concerning the secular idea represents a growing challenge to the intellectual assumptions and consensus that developed in the *Mashriq*. Ironically, though the book title signaled a dialogue between the two wings of the Arab region, it represented a rejection of the ideologies emanating from the *Mashriq* (Beirut and Cairo.)

This debate ushered in a new dawn in the Arab world, wherein the conversation focused on current Arabic speakers' relationship to their cultural repertoire (Turāth.) In the wake of these exchanges among Arab intellectuals, Jābirī and Ḥanafī began forging a new definition of the Arab Left. Displeased with the secular and excessively westernized "framework of reference" adhered to by progressive intellectuals in Beirut and Cairo, Jābirī and Ḥanafī called to form a new Islamic Left, *al-Yassār al-Islāmī*, by grounding their new identity in the Turāth. This call did not go unanswered. It had many writers wondering whether

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[63] Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

[64] Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "Retreat from the Secular Path? Islamic Dilemmas of Arab Politics," *The Review of Politics* 28, no. 4 (1966): 447–76; Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam," *Commentary Magazine* (blog), January 1, 1976, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/print-page/; Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford [England] ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[65] On the new Arab Left see: Sune Haugbolle, "The New Arab Left and 1967," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 497–512, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2017.1360008.

Jābirī and Ḥanafī had abruptly turned away from their previously progressive intellectual positions and ended up embracing atavist/Islamist positions after spending years criticizing Islamists for their ahistorical narratives of medieval Islam. The apparent reversal in attitudes promptly instigated a torrent of reactions from old and close friends on the Left, setting out a process at the end of which the intellectual configurations reshuffled, resulting in the creation of new intellectual groups, each with its own publishing houses, journals, and even affiliated universities. In the wake of these newfound polarizations among the Left block, one should ask what it meant to be progressive in the contemporary Arab world in the age of authenticity. Can one be progressive and still embrace the Turāth? Or should one do away with the Turāth in order to be progressive and maintain a coherent Leftist identity? This chapter explores the evolution of new debates around the Turāth and the new identities they generated. Apprehended by the authority that Jābirī and Ḥanafī exerted upon many intellectual institutions, a group of intellectuals headed by Syrian Jūrj Ṭarābīshī and Tunisian Lafif Lakhdar declared the establishment of the *Arab Rationalist Association* to protest the new cultural tendency to use history as a resource for establishing new modes of modernity.

The examination of the history of the *Arab Rationalist Association*, the standard bearers of this protest, illuminates a variety of aspects which the current scholarship kept in the dark. While conceiving the debate as one between Arab seculars versus Islamists, the major debate took place among the ranks of the Arab Left. This debate did not concern the West, either, but rather revolved around the relation to the Turāth, as will be made clear below. The *Association*'s history reaches back to the post-1967 era, yet it stood out in the dusk of the old millennium, amid the heated debates on the Turāth. In what follows, I investigate the most common threads, insights and concerns that brought the Association's members into one group. Three moments stand out as particularly essential to the formation of this group, which ultimately led its members to break with the classical Arab Left that formed in the first half of the century.[66] The first moment was the roaring 1960s. Despising the Turāth seemed the order of the day during the stormy years of the 1960s, when ideological thinking dominated Arab thought. This moment

[66] Christoph Schumann, ed., *Nationalism and Liberal Thought in the Arab East: Ideology and Practice*, SOAS/Routledge Studies on the Middle East (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2010), http://www.UTXA.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=484800; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006).

informed the ideas of a great many Arab Leftists who thought ill of the past. The second moment, in the post-1967, saw the breakdown of ideologies, a disenchantment that led to a new intellectual curiosity about the past. As earlier attempts to freeze the past into a distant memory proved futile and fruitless, many of the imported ideologies were defeated and scores of Arab scholars turned to the Turāth during the late 1970s in search of authentic frameworks to give meaning and answer to their anxieties, setting the stage for the defiance of the ideological age. The third moment involved pluralizing the Turāth. During the 1980s, as Turāth studies reigned supreme, exiled intellectuals challenged these emerging readings and interpretations of the Turāth. The remarkable efforts made by Mohammad Arkoun in Paris began to resonate among his students, who aimed to defunct the Turāth and the voices of authenticity. Offering a scathing critique of modern Islamic practices, Arkoun's scholarship opened the way to pluralizing the Turāth, which was the departure point for the *Arab Rationalist Association*'s counterattack.

From these three moments and debates, the outlook of the *Arab Rationalist Association* unfolded. For the *Association* members, this outlook was normally called secularism (*ʿAlmaniyya* rather than *ʿIlmaniyya*.) They propounded it as a *Rational* understanding of the misguided historical interpretation that sent the Arab world into its current historical impasse (ʾInsidād al-Tārīkhī). This Arab secularism, as manifested among the Association members, bore only a slight resemblance to the intense debates on secularism in western academia, where secularism is commonly conceived in relation to the emergence of the nation state and around the religious wars that raged within Christianity.[67] In these Western debates, recent scholarship has not only differentiated between political secularism and the secular,[68] but has also called into question the conventional ideas and concepts associated with the secular. In 2007, Charles Taylor disputed the rise of modernity as a story of loss, or "subtraction." He argued that "stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or

[67] Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Marcel Gauchet and Charles Taylor, *The Disenchantment of the World*, trans. Oscar Burge, Princeton University Press, 1999.

[68] "Political secularism" pertains to the modern state's relationship to, and regulation of, religion, while "secularity" refers to the set of concepts, norms, sensibilities, and dispositions that characterize secular societies and subjectivities. See Talal Asad et al., *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003).

sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge" is misrepresented.[69] Taylor is among a growing group of scholars who called into question the conventional account of secularism as simply the separation between church and state, religion and law, public and private. In his account, he presenting scathing critiques of this "minimalist formulation." Instead, Taylor, Assad, Connolly, Mahmood and others forcefully argued that the secular in fact "entails fundamental shifts in conceptions of self, time, space, ethics, and morality, as well as a reorganization of social, political, and religious life. The secular, in other words, is not the natural bedrock from which religion emerges, nor is it what remains when religion is taken away."[70] For these scholars, Mahmood writes, the secular "is itself a historical product with specific epistemological, political, and moral entailments—none of which can be adequately grasped through a nominal account of secularism as the modern state's retreat from religion."[71]

In the Arab world, however, this scholarship had not fully developed. Since Arab secularism lacked the originality and "authenticity" of European secularism, the *Association* members would re-read and re-interpret the Turāth to find seeds of secularism in past Islamic practices.[72] This is the context against which the members of the *Association* began conceiving Arab secularism to reflect a stance to be taken on religion and the Turāth. In this sense the secular philosopher Akeel Belgrami's definition of secularism is valid with regard to Arab secularism. Belgrami argued that "Secularism as a political doctrine arose to repair what were perceived as damages that flowed from historical harms that were, in turn, perceived as owing, in some broad sense, to religion."[73] This definition of secularism captures the meaning of the new outlook the Association fashioned. To grasp the meaning of this vague notion of the secular, I turn to a critical assessment of the historical debates around the Turāth as they emerged since the 1970s and led

[69] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 22.
[70] Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Sovereignty, and Religious Difference: A Global Genealogy?," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 2 (April 1, 2017): 197–209.
[71] Mahmood. Ibid.
[72] Ṭarābīshī, *Harṭaqāt*; Mohammed Arkoun and Hāshim Ṣāliḥ, *Qaḍāyā fī naqd al-ʿaql al-dīnī kayfa nafham al-islām al-yawm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 2004).
[73] Akeel Bilgrami, "Secularism: Its Content and Context," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 45, no. 1 (March 1, 2014): 27.

ultimately to the birth of the *Arab Rationalist Association*. Before considering these three moments in turn, a look at the background discussion Jābirī and Ḥanafī had started is in order.

Breaking Up the Arab Left Camp

Jābirī and Ḥanafī's forthright disavowal of the secular idea set the course for a new and elaborative discussion on the secular idea that the Arab world had never witnessed before.[74] Remarkably, the ground upon which they had come to rebuke secularism appears flimsy when compared to rigorous Western scholarship. They fell short, for example, of demonstrating that secularism has instigated more interfaith tensions, infighting and civil wars than it has resolved, as Saba Mahmood has amply shown.[75] Nor did their misgivings toward the secular idea stem from the fact that secularism had a hidden Christian genealogy[76] or that it belied an unmistakable Protestant implication.[77] In fact, Jābirī and Ḥanafī did not take that path in their repudiation of the secular. Their resistance to secularism proved (strangely!) orientalist in nature, describing secularism as an "imported problematic" (*Ishkāliyya Mustawradah*) imposed upon a society hardly trained and familiar with it's history and mechanisms. Like many Orientalists, they claimed that since Islamic historical experience lacks an analogous concept of the separation between Church and State, secularism remains foreign to the Arab land and extraneous to its intellectual structure.[78] For Jābirī and Ḥanafī, this absence explains why Arab societies shall not endeavor to embrace or accommodate secularism.[79] More than this unconvincing rejection illuminated these writers' opposition to the secular idea, it implied a rejection of intellectual agendas in Beirut and Cairo.

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[74] While the secular idea appeared on the Arab intellectual horizon in the late nineteenth century, the new debates around this western idea in the late 1980s recreated it anew. See: Shākir Nābulusī. *Al-Fikr Al-ʿArabī Fī Al-Qarn Al-ʿishrīn, 1950-2000: Dirāsah Naqdīyah Taḥlīlīyah Fī Thalāthat Ajzā'*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr ; Dār al-Fāris lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2001). Vol. II chapter ʿIlmaniyya.

[75] Saba Mahmood. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

[76] Talal Asad. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[77] Joseph Andoni Massad. *Islam in Liberalism.* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[78] It is remarkable that this argument fits well with Taylor's vision of the secular as a genuinely Western European idea. See: Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[79] Talal Asad rules out such a misleading comparison that stresses "*absenceness*." "There is a widespread conviction that Christian doctrine has been receptive" to democracy, secularism, human rights "because in Christendom (unlike Islam) church and state began as separate entities." See: Asad, Talal. *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Kindle Locations 452-453). Fordham University Press. Kindle Edition.

Jābirī and Ḥanafī's outright rejection of the secular idea was unforeseen in intellectual circles given their long literary record and an established reputation steeped in liberal and progressive writings. Since the beginning of the1970s, both scholars had expressed strong opinions against Islamists' approaches to the study of Islamic tradition and the Turāth. In their writings, Jābirī and Ḥanafī mounted an unrelenting assault against "quaint and clumsy Islamic interpretations." By virtue of these critical writings they gained more exposure and visibility among the more established intellectuals of Beirut and Cairo. By the mid-1980s, Jābirī and Ḥanafī rose to national prominence because they were able to reclaim the study of the Turāth from the "chaotic treatment" at the hands of "traditionalists and Islamists" (al-Turāthiyyin wal-Islāmiyyin) or what Ḥāmid Abū Zayd called "the hold of reactionary thought over tradition."[80] They offered a thorough scholarship that faced down Islamists, explicitly revealing inherent lapses and scandalous limitations in their epistemology, showing to all Islamists' lack of basic historical understanding.[81]

Of the countless attempts to challenge and undermine Islamists' hold on the study of the Turāth,[82] very few works cut as deeply into the essence of the Turāth question as Jābirī and Ḥanafī.[83] Theirs amounts to a radical shift away from reading and interpreting the Turāth within a linear history. With the introduction of structural methods to the study of Islamic history, their works sent shock waves to the bastions of conservative circles like al-Azhar. Yet their uncertainty and fumbling towards the secular question, which evolved into a firm repudiation of the secular idea during the 1990s, raised some serious questions among progressive intellectuals regarding the new trail Jābirī and Ḥanafī were blazing.

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[80] Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd. *Mafhūm Al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah Fī ʿulūm Al-Qurʾān*, Dirāsāt Adabīyah. Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣrīyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, 1990. p. 12.

[81] Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī. *Naḥnu Wa-Al-Turāth: Qirāʾāt Muʿāṣirah Fī Turāthinā Al-Falsafī*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1980); Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Al-Turāth Wa-Al-Tajdīd: Mawqifunā Min Al-Turāth Al-Qadīm*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Cairo: al-Markaz al-ʿArabī lil-Baḥth wa-al-Nashr, 1980).

[82] At the beginning of the 1970s, many intellectuals embarked on writing about the Turath to refute Islamists claims on past historical events. The most important works were by Arab Marxists: Ṭayyib Tīzīnī. *Min Al-Turāth Ilá Al-Thawrah: ḥawla Naẓarīyah Muqtaraḥah Fī Qaḍīyat Al-Turāth Al-ʿArabī*, (Damascus and Beirut: Dār Dimashq ; Dār al-Jīl, 1973); Ghali Shukri, *Al-Turath wal-Thawra* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1979).

[83] Nadia Wardeh, "The Problematic of Turāth in Contemporary Arab Thought: A Study of Adonis and Hasan Hanafi" (McGill University (Canada), 2008), https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/docview/763225813/abstract/14F95A9D9643454EPQ/1; Iskandar Mansour, "The Unpredictability of the Past: Turāth and Hermeneutics" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2000), https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/docview/304585347/abstract/6321F62E323E4961PQ/1.

In light of this literary background, one might not expect Jābirī and Ḥanafī to recant on their affirmed affiliation with the Left. Yet this is exactly what transpired. By calling into question the secular, however, Jābirī and Ḥanafī were not opposing a Western idea so much as revolting against the assumptions that underpinned progressive thinking in the *Mashriq*. More than any other intellectual in the Arab world, Jābirī was immensely frustrated with the intellectual hegemony of Cairo and Beirut. His mission to "pull back the secular slogan" was not a call against the West or a "retreat from the secular" but should rather be understood within the context of the newfound cultural war between the *Maghrib* and the *Mashriq*. Jābirī, one critic maintained, did not appropriate Gaston Bachelard's "epistemological break" in order to do away with the past, but instead to call for a break with the *Mashriq*.[84]

Jābirī represents the uprising of the intellectual margins against the center, the rise of the *Meghrib* against the *Mashriq*. When Jābirī argued that the "redundant idea of secularism" entered the intellectual horizon of the Arab world through Lebanon, he meant to denounce Lebanon as a center of misguided intellectual ideologies more than the secular idea. Ḥanafī was even more straightforward in his condemnation, writing that secularism was facilitated by *Mashriqi* Christian scholars like "Shibli Shmail, Yakub Saruf, Farah Anton, Niqula Hadad, Salamah Musa."[85] To dispute the very assumptions the old progressives in Beirut and Cairo took for granted, Jābirī and Ḥanafī hoped to forge a space essential for the creation of a new brand of progressivism that foregrounded the Turāth as a source of alternative modernity.[86]

To parochialize the old hubs of Arab intellectualism, Jābirī and Ḥanafī called attention to the hitherto disregarded Turāth, exposing progressives' disdain to a source of knowledge that gained more currency in the age of authenticity. Jābirī and Ḥanafī challenged the old guard of the Left with the simple question: What to do with the centuries-old Islamic Turāth? In an age when Europe made it clear to all non-Western societies that disowning their histories stands as a condition for being modern, the question of the Turāth takes on a form of cultural dilemma from the viewpoint of these challengers from North

84 Ṭarābīshī, Jūrj. *Wihdat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*. London, Saqi books, 2002.
85 Ḥanafī and Jābirī. *Ḥiwār Al-Mashriq Wa-Al-Maghrib*, 77.
86 Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī. *Takwin Al-ʿAql Al-ʿArabi* (Dār al-Ṭalīʿah lil-Ṭibāʿah wa-al-Nashr, 1984).

Africa. Indeed, the renewed intellectual conversation on the Turāth not only fit well in this age, but it also personified the Arab authenticity that defined this period. In this sense it brought to the open some of the simmering disputes among progressive intellectuals. While embracing the Turāth represented the revenge of the intellectual margins against the intellectual center, the Turāth debate also launched a conversation about whether it could serve as a model for modernity and social change. As in many non-Western spaces, the age of authenticity rendered the previous ease Arab intellectuals in Cairo and Beirut entertained with regard to Western secularism into a liability, for it implied an apparent contempt for Arab culture and Islam.

The call to look past the West in search of an alternative modernity, one that resides within the historical experience of the Arab Turāth, sparked a cultural reaction from intellectuals in Syria, Lebanon, and Tunisia. This cultural reaction was not only a proposal but a recipe for a new cultural war inside the Arab Left. During the 1990s, the Left camp fashioned two groups that began to take shape along parallel lines. The first group represented intellectuals who possessed an unyielding commitment to Arab-Islamic Turāth without relinquishing the demands for democracy and human rights. Members of this group protested the brand of modernity that took its inspiration solely from the west and viewed the Turāth with contempt. For this group, the genuine Hadātha, or the Arab brand of authentic modernity, emanates directly from Arabs' history. They denounced and deplored the modernity valorized by progressives in Beirut and Cairo, one that offered only dashed hopes and false dawns, since it failed to diversify the trajectories of modernity. This version of linear modernity that completely overlooked the Turāth and depended only on Western sources merely represents one instantiation among many other possibilities of being modern. While unwilling to reject western ideals, this group also refused to rule out the Turāth as a source of cultural renewal and modernity. Members of this group clustered around the Center for the Study of Arab Unity that began in Beirut in 1975 but was inhabited by mostly Moroccan scholars. Jābirī and Ḥanafī soon emerged as the forerunners of this group.

The other group consisted of intellectuals bent on casting the weight of Arab and Islamic Turāth aside to facilitate new models of living that past Islamic historical experiences only inhibited and excluded. Viewing the Turāth as a burden that inhibits Arab society's progress, these intellectuals' insistence on

thrashing the Turāth and Arab history more generally emerged as the main objectives which afford new possibilities to live fully in "the contemporary world." This group came to be known as the *Arab Rationalist Association (Rābiṭat al-ʿAqlānīyīn al-ʿArab)*, an organization founded in Paris. Established in 2003 as a separate intellectual movement, the *Association* offered a new framework within which to observe the dynamic of Arab intellectual debates over the last few decades. Though its history can be traced back to the 1960s, the *Association's* members come together only in the late 1990s to represent a different voice in the age of Arab authenticity. While most of the current scholarship on Arab thought focused on the first group, [87] the *Association* has never been acknowledged or explored except through negative references.[88]

Indeed, both of these intellectual groups worked together in the 1960s under *Dār al-Taliʿah* and *Dār al-Ādāb* in Beirut and shared common concerns and cultural anxieties. They had a similar national upbringing, came of age in the late 1950s, and grew up in a relatively secular environment. Yet these common characteristics could not gloss over the divergent sensibilities among them that eventually led to the split in the Left camp. The members of the *Arab Rationalist Association* were a group of self-imposed exiled intellectuals from Damascus, Aleppo, Beirut, and Tunis who deemed the Turāth an epistemological obstacle, an unsurpassable challenge on the road to advancement and progress. They fostered literary tastes and cultural propensities that vastly differed from those intellectuals in Morocco and elsewhere, who deemed the Turāth a richly intellectual tradition that could facilitate a different model of un-Western modernity.

Though the secular question on the pages of *al-Yaūm al-Sābiʿ* triggered new intellectual frictions, the controversy boiled down to the question of Turāth. The new consensus around the Turāth left the anti-Turāth movement, i.e. the *Association*, distraught and discontent. The *Arab Rationalist Association*

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[87] Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Suha Taji-Farouki, ed., *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, Qur'anic Studies Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2004); Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabiʿ, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London ; Sterling, Va: Pluto Press, 2004); Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Co, 2000).

[88] Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*; Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (March 20, 2006): 323–47.

formed in protest against the return of scores of intellectuals to the Turāth. One of its founding members, the Syrian scholar Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, pleaded with his readers to question the increased values Arabs had recently placed on authenticity. He called on his readers to ask themselves whether purity and authenticity are even desirable. He asked them to consider who benefits and who is being excluded from the debate on the Turāth. While Arab progressives in the 1960s used the West as a focal point of their debates about their relationship to the future, Ṭarābīshī wrote, they are now, ironically, arguing about their relationship to the past through the Turāth. For many members of the *Association*, this shift in direction indicated that Arab culture had taken a vast step backwards through its growing obsession with the Turāth.

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The Roaring 1960s: Thrashing the Past

During the mid-twentieth-century, many Arab Leftists conceived the eclipse of the Turāth as emancipatory. The Turāth seemed not only to straddle ordinary people with weighty traditions but also to stifle other human possibilities. This attitude toward the Turāth manifested in individual writings, journals and publishing houses that fashioned this newfound animosity toward the Turāth and the past in general. Dār al-Adāb, Dār al-Taliʿah and Dār al-ʿilm lil-Malāiyyin, three notable publishing houses in Beirut, firmly believed that creativity was released only after the Turāth had been relegated to the past. In the couple of decades after its establishment in the late 1950s to 1970s, Dār al-Taliʿah made a conscious decision not to publish works on the Turāth or the past in order to facilitate the emergence of new forms of artistic and cultural expression.[89] Dār al-Adāb published very few articles on the Turāth during its first two decades as compared with the post-1970s.

One expression of this attitude can be found in the writings of Syrian Marxist Ṣādiq Jalāl ʿAẓm, whose early books captured the sensibilities of this generation. Expounding on the cultural defeat against Israel in 1967, ʿAzm writes that "Arab masses are clearly lurching under the heavy weight of feelings, sentiments, forms of expression and styles of thinking which were formed as a result of centuries-long of decadence and cultural and scientific stillness." Trying to explicate the meaning of his position, ʿAẓm

[89] Ghadah Samman, *Bashīr al-Dāʿūq : kaʾannahu al-wadāʿ* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 2008).

elaborates that "This burden" of the Turāth "is poised to stall progress, revolution, socialism and any change or transformation in Arab life because of the power of continuity implicated in this past."[90] For ʿAẓm, in other words, steering clear of the Turāth represented the very definition of revolutionary.

Yet in 1967, as Israel dealt a harsh blow to the combined armies of three Arab states, these convictions that once gave unity to young progressives and revolutionaries began to crumble. The defeat demonstrated that Arab progressives and their ideologies are misleading, and therefore left many people searching for refuge and consolation in the Turāth. "After defeats, vanquished nations rely on their morals to survive the brunt of the military defeat,"[91] writes Wolfgang Shivelbosch, author of *Culture of Defeat*. "Nations do not usually embrace defeat in their mythology. Indeed, they do everything in their power to deny it."[92] In the wake of their countries' humiliating defeat in the war of 1967, Arab intellectuals turned to their Turāth in search of better models for living, as the ideologies of the time proved vacuous and destructive. "Nations that lose their state often take refuge in their church."[93] The defeat in 1967 was indeed a watershed moment. Jens Hanssen has recently argued that the tragedy of "1967 signaled the abandonment of historical reasoning for esoteric and essentialist logics."[94] This is the social reality which Arab progressives encountered as they began countering the public slide toward the past through the Turāth.

The Islamic rebound that snatched public discourse from progressive Arab intellectuals did not go unchallenged. It inspired a soulsearching among members of the Arab Left, who sought ways to curb the pervasive proclivity toward religious-mythical thinking.[95] Namely, the resurgence of mythical thinking triggered a wave of historicity whose first signs appeared on the horizon of the Arab world in the mid-

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[90] Ṣādiq Jalāl ʿAẓm. *Al-Naqd Al-Dhatti Baʿd Al-Hazimah* (Damascus: Dar Mamdūh ʿAdūan., n.d.), 88. See also the English edition: Ṣādiq Jalāl ʿAẓm and George Stergios. *Self-criticism after the defeat* (London: Saqi, 2011).
[91] Wolfgang Schivelbusch. *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, And Recovery*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 58.
[92] Schivelbusch, 60.
[93] Schivelbusch, 68.
[94] Jens Hanssen, "Albert's World: Historicism, Liberal Imperialism and the Struggle for Palestine, 1936-1948." In Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 63.
[95] Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*.

century.[96] For a growing number of progressives, historicity held the promise to disarm, or at least derail, the mythical thinking that began to take possession of the public imagination.[97] The early essays and books published in the wake of the defeat in 1967 offer concrete evidence of a surges in mythical public thinking. In Egypt, for example, Virgin Mary was reported to have made an appearance as her shadow hovered over a mosque in central Cairo, a story that preoccupied journalists, media networks and newspapers.[98] Feeling besieged by a straddling defeat, many Arabic speakers found relief in escapist alternatives, explained al-ʿAzm, a keen Marxist from Syria.

The resurrection of ahistorical thinking (mythical and gnostic, theological and linear), in the aftermath of the 1967, convinced many revolutionaries and progressive writers of the necessity for breaking with the Turāth, the wellspring of all irrational thinking. In 1955, Michael ʿAflaq, one of the three founders of the Baʿth party, marked the way as he called for challenging the "old ways" that feed corruption and sustain mythical thinking, insisting on the value of opposing the current conditions. According to ʿAflaq, "he who fails to firmly confront these conditions upfront, he who refrains from deconstructing them or paving the way to their destruction, is clearly biased."[99] In more forceful ways, ʿAflaq spoke of banishing the current norms and values: "The central idea of a revolutionary movement that addresses itself to change the course of life of a nation is to undo the common values. There is no doubt that the prevalent and embedded values are in harmony with and nurturing the [corrupted] current order; thus, it makes little sense to have these [old] values common among us while we are revolutionaries."[100] Shedding these values paves the way for change.

In 1967, another Marxist historian, ʿAbdallah Laroui (b. 1933), emerged to countervail the Turāth and the values it represented. Laroui chafed at the prevailing conception of history among many Islamists who viewed themselves on a continuum with the Turāth, portraying themselves as the only authentic

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[96] Israel Gershoni "The Crisis of Theory and Crisis in a Theory." In Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Y. Hakan Erdem, eds., *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

[97] Schivelbusch writes ""losers who have completed the first stage of reaction to defeat- surprise, dismay, disbelief, and the search for scapegoats- begin to examine their history for the deeper reasons behind their failure." Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, 69.

[98] Ṣādiq Jalāl ʿAẓm. *Naqd Al-Fikr Al-Dīnī.* Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1969.

[99] Michel ʿAflaq. *Fī Sabīl Al-Baʿth*. Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1970. p. 27.

[100] ʿAflaq, 30.

holders of a tradition that Mohammad launched in in the 7th century. Laroui claimed that this history pandered to a cultural nostalgia among Islamists longing for a vanished past in which Muslims were still able to lead the world.

Laroui was among the first to present historicity as a new approach through which to read and examine the Turāth. Calling to historicize the current "truth regimes of Islamic reason" and questioning its "normative claims," Laroui's historicity was seen as an antidote to Islamists. Laroui's main goal was to prepare the grounds for a new thought system to take hold in Arab society, one with a critical account of the Turāth. Laroui's historicity fashions a radical nonlinearity. This historicity accounts for ideas in a given time, a specific place, and within the context in which they take place. Laroui's notion of"imprisoning thought" meaning to constrain thought to a specific time and place, led Islamists to wage a cultural war against his ideas. They scoffed at his attempts to relativize eternal truths and beliefs. The very claim that truth (read: Islamic truths) is relative and proportional, and by no means absolute, left many Islamists distressed. Laroui was not alone in this cultural war against Islamists, however. Though he made many enemies, he nonetheless found many followers in Beirut, not the least of which was Yassin al-Hafiz, who propounded Laroui's opaque language to many readers.[101] Laroui's thrust resonated among a growing class of Arab progressives who adopted his argument that historical truth is contingent (*mashrūt*) on context, time, and place. The realization that truth can only be relative, conditional, and situational was a genuinely revolutionary idea. In its wake, the lines between Islamists and progressives were drawn, accentuated and formed. The chief adversary of historicity, Laroui remarked, is the belief in absolute truths (al-*ḥaqāʾiq al-muṭlakah)* that are conceived beyond time and place.[102]

History has no destiny, Laroui argued. History is created by people within their given conditions, not above or beyond them. Everything that takes place in human society is the outcome of human interaction with nature and with each other. Historical events have particular causes that historians have to characterize, trace down, and stipulate. Laroui's exclusion of any transcendental meddling in the

[101] ʿAbd al-Ilāh Balqazīz and Muḥammad Jamāl Bārūt, eds., *Al-Thaqāfah Al-ʿArabīyah Fī Al-Qarn Al-ʿishrīn: ḥaṣīlah Awwalīyah*. al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Bayrūt: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-ʿArabīyah, 2011), 562.
[102] ʿAbd Allāh ʿArawī. *al-Iydiyūlūjiyā al-ʿArabīyah al-muʿāṣirah*. al-Ṭabʿah 3 Beirut: Dār al-Taliʿa. 14–17.

making of history or its procession, incensed many in conservative circles who worked hard to negate his ideas. If, until the late 1960s, the lines that separated Arab Left from Islamists were blurred and vague, Laroui's ideas of historicity recreated them anew, polarizing the two parties.

When Laroui published his book *The Arab Ideology*, it was a remarkable departure from the established discourse among Arab intellectuals, which focused on the question of crafting a unique Arab philosophy and determining its constitutive components[103] Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd (1905-1993), one of Egypt's towering figures in the second half of the century, writes that he spent his life wrestling with this question. In January 1964, Maḥmūd launched a new journal "*Majalat Fikr Muʿāṣir*" dedicated to unpacking the meaning of this question.[104] In his writings, Maḥmūd gives a sample of literary tastes and the kinds of issues with which many writers coped. Maḥmūd writes that he swung between leaning toward the Turāth and leaning toward the Ḥadātha, offering vague answers. Despite his late-life tilt toward embracing western models, Maḥmūd shied away from declaring the death of the past in his well-read works.[105]

Laroui looked beyond this discourse that beleaguered Arab thought since the late nineteenth century. He deemed Islamists' insistence on following the example of the past a failure to instigate any substantive change in current society. He therefore aimed to affect an epistemological break (*katīʿah maʿrifiyyah*) with the Turāth, a fundamental break to create new possibilities for Arab growth. Explaining the necessity of this epistemological break, Laroui argued that a society that is hiding in its "shell" or "authenticity cocoon" *sharnaqat al-ʾAṣālah* requires an "epistemological shock".[106] Yet, claiming that "man is historical by nature" and that "man is defined by time" did not appeal to Islamists who could see in Laroui's historicity nothing more than an abortive attempt to de-glorify a Turāth they grew up admiring.

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[103] Zaki Najib Muhmod, "Jadal al-Insan." *Majalat Fikr Muʿaṣir*, October 8, 1964.

[104] Maḥmūd was the first chief editor, then Egyptian philosopher Fouad Zakkariyya took over. The journal was shut down in 1971, when Sadat took over the regime in Egypt. Said Tawfik. See: http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/430917.aspx

[105] For two different and contradictory readings of Maḥmūd's work, see: Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Jūrj Tarābīshī, *Madhbaḥat al-turāth fī al-thaqāfah al-ʿarabīyah al-muʿāṣirah* (London: Dar Al Saqi, 1993).

[106] ʿAbd al-Ilāh Balqazīz, *Naqd Al-Turāth*, al-Ṭabʿah 1, Al-ʿArab Wa-Al-ḥadāthah 3 (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-ʿArabīyah, 2014), 411.

Nonetheless, Laroui expressed Arab progressives' disregard for the Turāth more than he defended historicity.

Ideological Breakdown and the Turn to the Turāth

Mohammad ʿAbid al-Jābirī (1935-2010) became the first to counter the arguments propounded by his countryman Laroui. Jābirī was an emerging intellectual in Morocco during the 1970s, and he realized that Laroui's proposals were inapplicable because they followed the European script, according to which Arabs had to disown their Turāth to become modern. Inspired by seventeenth-century German writer Novalis, who famously said, "only the gaze that is turned backward can bring us forward, for the gaze that is turned forward leads us backward," Jābirī argued that Arab Marxists' call to abandon the Turāth proved vacuous and gravely misleading. He assailed Arab Marxists propensity to apply ready-made Marxist categories and concepts, which were executed with little to no attention to the particularities and nuances of Arabs' historical experience. Ever since the mid-1970s, Jābirī had confronted Arab Marxists' and Islamists' (mis)reading of the Turāth in a series of seminars at Mohammad V University in Rabat where he taught for the entirety of his career. The collection of these lectures was later published in an extraordinary book entitled "Contemporary Arab Discourse".[107]

Jābirī proposed an entirely different approach to the Turāth. For Jābirī, the Arab past was not detached from the present. Unlike the West, where the past is separated from the present, the Arab world does not regard the past as a distinctive unit. The past continues to live on in the present, and therefore the call for a clinical break between the two appears ludicrous. This articulation of the past and present leads Jābirī to develop a new conception of time (*al-zaman al-mutadākhil*) which views the Turāth as a constitutive mechanism of Arab thought. The social imagination of Arabic speakers attests to the "synchronized time" that views past and present on the same level. Jābirī goes on to fault Marxists and Islamists for adhering to outdated notions of linear time that posited the past as either a problem or an example to be followed. For Jābirī, past historical events, though they initially seem far removed from current political structures, still condition the way politics unfold and are imagined in the Arab world.

[107] Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī. *Al-Khiṭāb Al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāṣir*. al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 1982).

Arab Marxists' primary fault, according to Jābirī, was in their unrelenting attempt to preach for a disengagement with and a departure from the Turāth. The very conception of time in Marxist theory is therefore misguiding and meaningless.[108] This is because Arab Marxists were oblivious to the fact that the Arab world lives simultaneously in the past and present.[109] Jābirī refers to this new articulation of time as (*mutazamin*) where different times merged with one another and lived in full correlation and synchrony.[110]

The more urgent question is not to look past the Turāth, but to explore it. By overlooking the Turāth, Arab progressives did not remove its impact on the way current Arabspeakers lead their lives. Therefore, the call to embrace new models from the West only exasperates rather than alleviates the challenges ahead. The more compelling question has to do with the Turāth itself. At the center of Jābirī's project stands the question: why does the Turāth, which no longer represents a lived experience, retain a hold over Arab people's imagination? How should we deal with it? Over the next few years Jābirī would become one of the most-read Arab intellectuals, not only overshadowing his countryman Laroui, but also publishing a series of books under the title "Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi," which was translated into more than sixteen Islamic and non-Islamic languages.

Jābirī provided a rewarding but nonetheless laborious answer to the Arab need for the Turāth. He accepted Laroui's basic idea of the necessity for separating the present from the past but the two of them disagreed regarding the method . If Laroui demonstrated the Turāthʿs loss of validity over the present by way of historicity, Jābirī maintains that only by returning to the Turāth is one able to dismantle, dislocate, and displace the fortress of the Turāth that looms large over the present. One of Jābirī's students, Kamal ʿAbd al-Latif put it succinctly when he wrote that Jābirī meant to "disengage the Turāth by re-engaging it." Namely, the way to nullify the authority of the Turāth passes through the Turāth rather than by "escaping" from it (as Arab Marxists thought.)[111]

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[108] Jabiri develops this point in the introduction of his work on the Turath, see: Jābirī. *Naḥnu Wa-Al-Turāth*. (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 1979)

[109] Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī. *Takwin Al-ʿAql Al-ʿArabi* (Dār al-Ṭalīʿah lil-Ṭibāʿah wa-al-Nashr, 1984), 37–54.

[110] Jabiri discussed the concept of heterogeneous time and the co-presence of multiple times two decades before Chatterjee made this idea known in the West. See: Partha Chatterjee, "The Nation in Heterogeneous Time," *Futures*, Futures beyond nationalism, 37, no. 9 (November 2005): 925–42.

[111] Kamal ʿAbd al-Latif, "Fi Dhikra al-Jabiri," in *al-ʿArabi al-Jadid*, May 3, 2014.

Jābirī established his analysis on the assumption that the Turāth indulged unfettered sway in contemporary Arab societies, an authority that has not been challenged despite all the *Iṣlaḥ* movements.[112] It shapes the way Arabic speakers conceive the world around them and define their tastes, aesthetics, morals and ethical attitude toward the family, faith and the Other. Jābirī extended his arguments by maintaining that the question of Turāth is not merely about understanding the past per se but also remains essential to the question of Hadāthah (*suʿal al-Hadāthah*.) In other words, Jābirī maintains that it would be impossible to grasp the current paralysis in post-colonial Arab affairs without first understanding twentieth-century Arabs' "unhealthy relationship with the Turāth" by revising it. Rather than calling for the disposal of the Turāth, Jābirī insisted on displacing it by means of making the past a gateway for Arab rationalism.

Turning his attention to the Islamists, Jābirī contended that they also did no justice to the Turāth. Islamists failed to appreciate temporality and time-constituent concepts of history, bogged down by teleological and linear historical narratives. They arranged the Turāth according to certain patterns and periodization that make little sense of history. Yet, while Jābirī spent less time deconstructing Islamists' visions and conceptions toward the Turāth, he nonetheless compelled many to ask why it is no longer possible to ignore the Turāth the way many progressives desired. This questioning rendered Laroui's call for a break redundant.

Yet, Jābirī's passionate advocacy for the Turāth led him to highly problematic positions and conclusions. Jābirī, for example, argued that Arab Hadātha should emerge from within (*min al-dākhil*) the Turāth, not outside it. Namely, the Turāth, if read and examined from a non-ideological position, could provide a new trajectory for Arab modernity from within Arab cultural soil. He viewed any modernity external to the domain of the Turāth as doomed to fail because it is borrowed, faked, and imposed from above. In the second volume of *Naqd*, he made this conclusion clear: "there is no path to renewal and Hadātha except from within the Turāth, its mechanisms and possibilities."[113] This was not only a direct

[112] See the introduction in Jābirī, *Naḥnu Wa-Al-Turāth*. And Jābirī, *Takwin ʿAql al-ʿArabi*. Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿah. 1984.
[113] Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī. *Binyat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī: Dirāsah Taḥlīlīyah Naqdīyah li-Nuẓum Al-Maʿrifah Fī al-Thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah*, al-Ṭabʿah 1. (Beirut: Dār al-Taliʿah 1986), 568.

rebuttal to Laroui's ideas, which viewed European modernity as the only pathway out of Arab post-colonial plights. Jābirī's excessive reliance on the Turāth as a source of renewal clashed with the ideas of a growing circle of intellectuals who had clustered around Mohammad Arkoun in Paris. Many of these scholars rightly claimed that though Jābirī started off progressive, he ended up reaffirming Islamists' positions. Jābirī not only condemns western modernity as "extraneous" but also limits the possibilities of Arab renewal and modernity to the Turāth.

Pluralizing the Turāth

As the twentieth century drew to a close Arab Left progressives gradually began to assume a secular identity. Secularism, though vague and ambiguous, caused a split within the Arab Left. The secular Arab critics of the Left had to face a truth they increasingly fretted over but did not confront: many aspects of culture, high and low, that once seemed securely in the progressives' possession appeared to be vulnerable to capricious appropriations by the now-emboldened and empowered Islamists.[114] Jābirī, a member of the old Arab Left, ended up boosting, rather than warding off, Islamism. His project did little to allay secular intellectuals' concerns and anxiety. A backlash against Jābirī was in the making. Not only did Jābirī view the Turāth as the only possible pathway for renewal, but he also warned that Arab modernity must not follow on the path of Europe. The age of catching up with Europe, he claimed, is over.

Mohammad Arkoun (1928-2010) was among the first to dispute Jābirī's project, claiming that the latter failed to account for the Turāth in its entirety.[115] Arkoun did not deny the merits of the Turāth as a source of the Arab self, yet he assailed Jābirī for politicizing and weaponizing the Turāth. Arkoun criticized Jābirī for malfeasance and mis-application of the epistemological method to Islamic history. Writing from Paris, where he studied and taught at the Sorbonne, Arkoun was not beset with the same questions that agonized Jābirī. Rather, Arkoun asked a different set of questions that framed his intervention in these debates. As he embarked on writing about the Turāth, Arkoun had two goals in mind:

[114] For a critical view of so called *Islamizing Knowledge* see: Ṭarābīshī, *Harṭaqāt*; 'Afif Al-Akhdar, "Hal Islah Al-'Arabiyya Dururi Wa Mumkin?," Alawan.org, accessed April 2, 2015, http://www.alawan.org/article12036.html.
[115] Arkoun develops the idea of Exhaustive Tradition that reflects a holistic an inclusive view of the Turath. Arkoun, Mohammad. *Naḥwa naqd al-ʿaql al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿah, 2009).

contesting biased Western knowledge on Islam and calling into question the historical knowledge being produced by traditional circles in the Middle East. His protest was a call against "the established symbolic and semantic system of how to approach Islam."[116]

Arkoun's concern focused on definitions: How was one to define the field of Turāth? Where should one draw the boundaries? How should one read the Turāth? What does the Turāth consist of? These questions led him to create what he hoped to be an Applied Islamism (*Appliquèe Islamologie*) that would counter the ill-equipped knowledge on Islamic societies generated in both the West and the East. Arkoun's notion starts with the premise that Arab Turāth was predominantly developed in an oral culture; the examinations of collective memory and social imagination therefore take precedence in his intellectual pursuits.

In 1984, the same year in which Jābirī published his masterpiece *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, Arkoun published *Naqd al-ʿAql al-Islami*. Both Arkoun and Jābirī found inspiration in French theories, Foucault's work in particular, and both of them used epistemology to examine the reasons and the mechanisms that generated and organized Islamic knowledge, steering away from what they called the obsolete history of ideas. They also shared one similar conclusion: far from being a dead tradition, Islamic Turāth is still a living tradition in the social imagination of the contemporary Arab world (as unconscious knowledge). Yet, Arkoun argued that cultures that invoke long-gone pasts are hardly unique to Arabic-speaking people, while Jābirī viewed the dominant presence of the Turāth as a symptom of post-colonial Arab malaise. Arkoun countered that the turn to the Turāth was an integral part of "theological societies." Through this reversion to the Turāth, Arkoun claimed, Arab societies preserve the story they tell themselves about the past and keep coherent their notion of cultural identity. Though they shared methods and approaches, Arkoun and Jābirī took two different paths. Jābirī's was a case study that looked primarily at Islamic philosophy to understand the way in which Arab reason performed styles of speeches, linguistic categories, etc. through its modes of reasoning,. Arkoun's was a highly theoretical work that examined

[116] Ursula Günther "Mohammad Arkoun: towards a radical rethinking of Islamic thought," in Taji-Farouki, *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, 125.

the Turāth as an integrated unit, trouncing Jābirī for fragmenting the unity of the Turāth into three epistemic mechanisms: philosophy, mythology and gnosticism.

Disputing various definitions that limited the Turāth to *Fiqh* or philosophy or mysticism, Arkoun argues that much of the historical writings on Islamic societies were bedeviled by definitions. Rather than studying a single case or an event, Arkoun's project was an invitation to carry out extensive research on the Turāth over a long span of time. For Arkoun, Jābirī's works had not only reduced the Turāth to rational-philosophical thinking but also created correspondence between Islamic philosophy and Turāth. Jābirī followed Islamists in creating parallelism between Islamic jurisprudence and Turāth. Both Jābirī and Islamists have constrained and limited the scope of Turāth to one salient aspect. Arkoun, instead, demonstrates that the Turāth should not be reduced to its components. His was a protest against the view that "Islam was mostly reduced to Sunnism and Arabism."[117] To fully grasp the meaning and scope of the Turāth, scholars should not rule out anything as they investigate Medieval Islamic societies. Myths are equally significant as rational thinking and Sufism, since all provide priceless historical insights on the different modes of knowledge transmission and social imagination in Islamic societies.

Arkoun criticized classical Islamic methods, which led the field of Islamic studies to "an intellectual closure and methodological deadlock."[118] Arkoun reminds his readers that Islam emerged in a distinctly oral culture, which developed according to a different logic than the written or scientific culture. In their treatment of oral culture, Arkoun argues, historians, anthropologists, linguists, and sociologists had to heed to different sets of cultural expressions, most notably drawings, songs, dance, urban planning and architecture, all of which are fundamental to the understanding of the "Quranic societies". "Finding the neglected, forgotten and imagined are essential to grasping the Islamic phenomena, without which, historians squander the expression energy to read the intellectual-cultural map of Islam."[119]

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[117] Ursula Günther "Mohammad Arkoun: towards a radical rethinking of Islamic thought," p.129
[118] Arkoun and Ṣāliḥ, *Qaḍāyā fī naqd al-'aql al-dīnī kayfa nafham al-islām al-yawm*.
[119] Arkoun and Ṣāliḥ, 217–218.

In his investigations Arkoun emphasized three methodswith which to approach the Turāth: *impense`e* (unthinkable), *impensable* (impossiblility of thinking), and Islamic Reason. Arkoun's proposals were promptly embraced by his students. By opening up the field to new questions, exploring new themes and understudied or marginalized areas of study, Arkoun's project afforded scholars the opportunity to explore new areas: Islamic ethics, humanism in Medieval Islam, the dialectical relations between violence and the sacred, history and truth, the relations between sovereignty and legitimacy, and the study of the diverse forms of ritualization in Islamic piety. This inquiry amounted to a tremendous break with past definitions of the Turāth that were portrayed by Jābirī and others as authentic. This conceptualization allowed Arkoun's students and followers to call into question many assumptions that casted a sacred aura on the Turath.[120]

Remarkably, many scholars were disappointed by Arkoun, given that his project did not provide concrete answers to the cultural questions that had risen out of post-colonial conditions.[121] His refusal to resolutely rule out the Turāth, and his resistance toward fully embracing it, amplified this dissatisfaction with Arkoun. Indeed, Arkoun tread a middle ground, uncharted and un-articulated. His work offered new problematics and made thinkable new topics from the Turāth that others had neglected. Yet he rarely provided answers. Given Arkoun's concern with the question of periodization and the "content" of the Turāth he suggested new definitions while rarely offered a solid opinion on any movement in the Turāth. For this reason, his work was rightly accused of beingis rife with theories and abstract ideas, structural and post-structural idioms. For example, Arkoun used the idea of power in Islamic experience to measure its applicability and utility. Power, in Arkoun's work, embodied through acts of emission rather than commission, the power to erase rather than to register. By introducing these new topics, definitions and theories, Arkoun hoped not only to unsettle the absolute truth regimes in history, but also to re-establish what he called the ideal of plurality of meaning in Islam. For Arkoun it is not enough to deconstruct the mechanisms through which meanings are constructed, for which Jābirī's work was credited. Arkoun took

[120] al-ʿAfīf al-Akhḍar. *Min Muḥammad al-īmān ilá Muḥammad al-Tārīkh* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2014).
[121] Balqazīz, *Naqd Al-Turāth*, 382.

this idea a step further and maintained that historians should deconstruct the mechanisms of *managing meaning*, which the "guardians of orthodoxy" elevate as sacred and transcendent.

In sum, the vocabulary and analysis Arkoun put forward opened a new intellectual avenue for a group of self-exiled intellectuals and students to stake their own claims on the Turāth. What Arkoun called "the construction of belief," for instance, sparked an interrogation among his disciples, who endeavored to search the divergent paths through which the Turāth made possible certain beliefs while precluding others. Though unhappy that their teacher did not take a more resolute position against the Turāth, his students thanked him for making breakthroughs that facilitated fresh interpretations of the Turāth.

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The rise of anti-Turāth sentiments

The debates between Arkoun, Jābirī, and Laroui established the Turāth as the main playing field on which ideas and intellectual positions were articulated. The growing consensus regarding the value and centrality of the Turāth signaled a radical change in the modes of production, styles of writing and publication in the Arabic-speaking region in the closing decades of the twentieth-century. Previously mocked and derided, the Turāth found a new symbolic meaning in the raging cultural war at the beginning of the 1980s. As a trove of cultural texts, styles of thinking, and modes of behavior, the Turāth, a product of a millennium, emerged yet again as the main area of study with which every scholar had to reckon.

By the turn of the twentieth-first century, the demands of yesterday's revolutionists and progressives in the 1950s-70s to dispose with the Turāth were seen as travesty. The Turāth's endurance and hold over the minds of ordinary citizens could no longer be brushed aside as many Marxists initially thought.[122] Arabic-speakers' attachment to the Turāth proved deeper and more intrinsic to their existential conditions. So rather than trying to manage these relations, the new secular critics conceded that they now sought to demonstrate that these relations could be dangerous,[123] could inflict violence,[124] and could be

[122] Even ex-Marxists, like Jurj Tarabishi, acknowledged that the Arab Marxists' narrative was misleading. Arab Marxists "edit [the Turath] selectively" and "treat the experience of various fortunate groups as the measure of a much messier reality." Marxists, he argued, "fragmented" and "tore apart" the coherence of the Turath. See:

[123] al-ʿAfīf al-Akhḍar. *Min Muḥammad al-īmān ilá Muḥammad al-tārīkh*. Beirut, Dar al-Jamal. 2014.

[124] Bin Slama. *Naqd al-thawābit : ārā' fī al-ʿunf wa-al-tamyīz wa-al-muṣādarah* (Beirut: Rabitat al-ʿAqlaniyin al-Arab, 2005).

irrational.[125] By way of displacement and deconstruction, these writers aimed to limit the Turāth's authority in contemporary times. When the vast majority of Arab intellectuals took part in "managing the meaning" of the collective memory of the Turāth (what should be eliminated, memorized, re-conceptualized or reconstructed), the secular critics of the *Association* found themselves delving into the Turāth to demonstrate the adverse effects it had on contemporary Arabs. Their point of departure was taken from Arkoun's works that Islamic thought was developed under a different episteme and has a different reason and truth order.

Secular critics' interrogations remade the field of Turāth studies and reconfigured the intellectual tastes of these scholars. In 1984, Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, whose book *Heretics* gained him notoriety, admitted that Jābirī's works had "changed" him and stimulated him to "return" and "rebuild his philosophical education of the Turāth." "After reading Jābirī," Ṭarābīshī confessed, "the mind (*al-thihniyya*) would no longer remain the same. This thesis not only educates, but also stirs up a radical change."[126] Ṭarābīshī, whose gratitude belied a critique of this backward pull toward the Turāth, would champion the first intellectual movement that opposed the Turāth.

Jābirī's position on the Turāth carried the day. The Turāth was not a dead tradition but a field of study clamoring for renewed intellectual explorations. The previous smugness of Arab revolutionaries in Beirut and Cairo, who proclaimed themselves progressives, proved no more than empty talk. Their ideologies were far removed from the average Arab's concerns, insensible to his piety and belief system. Yet, the alternative that Jābirī valorized was equally unsettling. In his writings, Jābirī returned to the same grooves of the Islamists, failing to live up to his premises as he returned to the Turāth and remained there. A growing number of intellectuals saw that Jābirī has succumbed to Islamists' ideologies and offered unmistakable indications that validate these accusations. In one essay after another, Jābirī adopted a new line of thinking to strip the *Mashriq* of its intellectual superiority, casting doubts on the genesis of the

[125] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. *Min Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Riddah: Tamazzuqāt Al-Thaqāfah Al-'Arabīyah Fī 'aṣr Al-'awlamah*. Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2000.
[126] See: Jurj Tarabishi,. *Al-Wiḥdah*, volume 1, 1984. P. 80.

Arab *nahḍa* and arguing instead that the first true roots of Arab reforms began with Mohammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in Arabia, roughly five decades before Napoleon invaded Egypt.[127]

Turning the intellectual conversation to the Turāth collided with the contemporary values of universalism, the unity of the human mind, universality of human rights and basic human norms that many secular critics cherished and upheld for years. The renewed re-enchantment with the Turāth was seen by these secular critics as lacking a critical thrust. Distasteful and sullen towards the institutionalization of new intellectual norms that sprung from the Turath framework, secular critics began to coalesce together. They grew firm in their belief that the order of the day was not to enchant people with a glorious Turāth, but rather to ensure that Arabic speakers inculcated the idea that there could be no literal return to some earlier point in time and there could be no forced or artificial reconstruction of the Turāth within the present post-colonial conditions. The only choice for Arabs today, they professed, was to embrace modernity instead of running away from it.

The call to exert a healthy dose of critique towards the Turāth soon developed into a call to assume rationalism, implying that any return to the Turāth constituted irrationalism. The demand for rationalism gained popularity against the growing literature that elevated the Turāth above scrutiny. Deeming the return to the Turāth irrational, these otherwise sporadic secular critics found a common cause in urging rationalism in order to stave off the sweep of irrational thinking in Arab society toward the past. These scholars, aghast at the new dominant intellectual paradigms, challenged Jābirī's articulations of the Turāth. Their deep disenchantment with the new mainstream that formed around Jābirī's ideas and reverberated through a newly built network of publishing houses, sustained anti-Turāth sentiments among these scholars. Soon they began probing for a way out of these stifling frameworks.

Fighting Jābirī became the first item on the agenda for this group of secular scholars. In practice, this meant demonstrating that the Turāth could not stand alone as an alternative model to modernity, nor as a prescription for forging a new Arab subjectivity. In their extensive writings, secular critics refused to accept the common conception of the Turāth as an inventory of permanent values, which are seen as

[127] Jābirī, *Naḥnu Wa-Al-Turāth*. Ḥanafī and Jābirī, *Ḥiwār Al-Mashriq Wa-Al-Maghrib*.

authentic and indigenous. They argued that the Turāth not only contains Ibn Rushd's philosophy, Ibn Khaldun's social theories, and al-Shatibi's rationalism but also teems with harrowing experiences, gruesome murders, and horrendous civil infighting. Ṭarābīshī, ʿAzīz al-Azmeh, Ben Slāma, Lafif Lakhdar, Sharafi, and many others called attention to the deleterious effects generated by the Turāth. In Spring 2004 they came together and declared the establishment of the *Arab Rationalist Association*.[128]

The launching of the *Association* marked a significant event in contemporary Arab thought. It signified that the intellectual debate was no longer between seculars and Islamists, as it was previously thought to be, but between different brands of Leftists like Jābirī and secular critics like Ṭarābīshī. The foundations of this debate were no longer rooted in Marxism, Existentialism, Nationalism or any Western philosophy as they were in the 1950s-60s. The new frameworks of contemporary Arab thought were articulated against the Turāth, upon which the cultural war was fought.

In the years following its establishment, the *Arab Rationalist Association* undertook to confront and dismantle the framework of the Turāth. Fashioning a new discourse, they adopted a two-pronged strategy: they contrasted the Turāth discourse with the more inclusive human story and the universal ideals of Third Worldism that they fostered during the 1960s. Human rights and universal values, they argued, do not discriminate between nations, ethnicities, or religious groups the way the Turāth does. Utilizing universal values carried its own faults, but for the members of the *Association* these values called into question the meaning of the Turāth. The human story, they maintained, has many virtues as an organizing story. It welcomes each new group and provides a template for how it fits into the common move of humanity from religion to secularism, oppression to dignity, and tyranny to liberty. The unifying story of the Turāth, they argued, leaves many ethnic and unorthodox groups out of the social consensus in Arab societies. The Quran, for example, though filled with examples of social justice- care for the vulnerable, equality of all souls- discounts and rules out deviancy and invalidates untraditional views. The prevailing story of the Quran, as promulgated by Muslim theologians, does not offer a compelling message to all

[128] On the proceedings of the conference that launched this Association see: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, ed., *Al-Ḥadāthah Wa-Al-ḥadāthah Al-ʻArabīyah: Mu'tamar Ishhār Al-Mua'ssasah Al-ʻArabīyah Lil-Taḥdīth Al-Fikrī, Muhdá Ilá Idwārd Saʻīd, 30 Nīsān/Ibrīl - 2 Ayyār/Māyū 2004*, al-Ṭabaʻh 1 (Dimashq: Dār Bitrā lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʻ, 2005).

citizens in the post-colonial age as far as the members of the Association are concerned. In fact, it excludes vulnerable groups as misfits, outcasts, and heretics, a category that includes secular critics. For these scholars, no matter how enriching the Turāth could be, it constitutes only a small fraction of human history. It blocks Arabs from drawing on more diverse and colorful histories that could enrich and educate them. This essential human history has dropped from the public and educational agendas in many Arab states.

To invalidate the Turāth as the sole model of Arab modernity, secular critics assumed another strategy. They focused on disseminating the ideas that emerged in the recent past, namely the *nahḍa*, as a model for renewal in the post-colonial times (see chapter four). The *nahḍa* stood as a remarkable era in Arab thought for offering a full expression of intercultural borrowing. It bears witness to a willingness to open up to other cultures. Before the discourse of the *nahḍa* was expunged from the grand narratives of the Arab world, it sustained a distinctive willingness to lean on the West and adopt social and cultural models from diverse cultures. The Lebanese scholar Jamīl Bayyham, one of the intellectuals of the *nahda*, said at the beginning of the twentieth century that "The East today exists in a learning and developing [stage], and his teacher is the West."[129] Commenting on his ideas and attitude, Ṭarābīshī explains that "Contrary to subsequent generations of the *nahḍa*, who desired to assert their identity not through taking from the West but against it, Jamīl Bayyham did not feel uneasiness asserting the imperative and indispensability of teaching the East on the hands of the West."[130]

This forgotten perspective of the *nahḍa* was now retrieved and weaponized to push back against the narrow-mindedness within the discourse of the Turāth. To reconnect with the overlooked *nahḍa*, the *Association* began reconstructing histories of diverse *nahḍawi* figures[131] to counter the narrative of Turāth as a discourse of authenticity. As Slāma, Ṭarābīshī, and Lakhdar have illustrated at length, , the *nahḍa* writers did not shut themselves off from the world, unlike the current generation of Arab writers. In their

[129] Muḥammad Jamīl Bayyuhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*, al-Ṭab'ah 1 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr, 1980), 39.
[130] Bayyuhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*. P.39-41
[131] Jurj Tarabishi. Muḥammad Jamīl Bayyuhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr, 1980); Āminah Waslātī and Ben Slama. *al-Mar'ah wa-al-mashrū' al-ḥadāthī fī fikr al-Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād* (Ṣafāqis : Ṣāmid lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2012).

openness lies the antidote to the current short-sightedness that has triumphed over all sorts of intellectual investigations.

Conclusion

Even if the turn to the Turāth did not give rise to a paradigmatic shift, it nonetheless constituted a break with previous patterns of Arab thought. The frenzy with which intellectuals pursued the debates on the Turāth signaled a departure in the ways the Arab Left defined itself. While in the 1960s, the Arab Left rallied around Nationalist[132], Marxist[133] and Existentialist[134] agendas, at the end of the century it was the anti-Turāth sentiments that unified the new Arab Left progressives. In fact, the involvement with the Turāth question led ultimately to the emergence of the secular question, reintroducing it to public discourse after years of disregard.

The late 1970s heralded the end of an era in Arab intellectual history and launched a new period of Arab thought characterized by its grappling with the Turāth. Suddenly fundamental issues that evaded any comprehensive treatment in the roaring 1960s emerged. Questions like how to organize Arab society in an inclusive fashion that incorporates its unique history were up for debate. The modern institutions and European constitutions that the post-colonial state introduced right after independence were now seen as alienating and oblivious to people's faith, indigenous values, and family principles. The main question with which Arab intellectuals grappled concerned the unfolding post-colonial condition. With the sweep of national politics that both crushed local communities and tore apart the social fabric (tribes, Sufi circles, villages etch.), these intellectuals, earnestly struggled to find ways to heal Arab society, especially after the passing of Nasser and the apparent failure of the pan-Arab ideology How would they reweave the social fabric in the post-colonial Arab state? Was it through the renewal of the Turāth? or was the Turāth merely a weak glue that would temporarily hold diverse ethnicities and religious minorities together? For the *Association*, tthe Turāth could not provide an antidote, for it most likely poised to rip through Arab

[132] A. I. Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2003); Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*.
[133] Samer Frangie, "Historicism, Socialism and Liberalism After The Defeat: On the Political Thought of Yasin Al-Hafiz," *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 02 (August 2015): 325–52; Abu-Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought*.
[134] Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization*, 1 edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

society and fragment the social cohesion created by the national idea, one that melted difference into one nation.

The intellectual themes around which the notoriously fragmented Arab Left united lost much of their previous momentum and critical thrust. With the rise of the Turāth as a cultural problematic against which intellectual positions were articulated, the intellectual center of gravity moved westwards. Morocco, previously marginal to Arab intellectual thought, began asserting its place and calling into question the ideas, assumptions and ideologies that emanated from traditional centers of Arab intellectualism :Beirut and Cairo. As the intellectual margins of the Arabic-speaking world widened, new intellectual themes emerged, challenging Beirut's monopoly on knowledge production. Exploring the work of the *Association* through its publication, organs (al-Awan), and vehement opposition to current intellectual debates in the Arab world offers a clearer picture of the fluid debates in the current Arab world. While many observers of current intellectual movements have recently asserted the pertinence of the formula of Islam versus the West,[135] this chapter demonstrates that unlike the 1960s, contemporary Arab intellectual debates focused more on the Turāth and less and less on the West. As we will see in the next chapter, the making of the Turāth not only constituted a cultural response to the defeat in 1967 and to the bankruptcy of the Marxist ideology, but the process was fraught with politics that had far-reaching implications.

[135] Taji-Farouki, *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*.

CHAPTER II: THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW FIELD

In 1971, Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, the Egyptian positivist and author of many philosophical works in Arabic, prefaced his remarkable *The Renewal of Arab Thought*, with the following:

"The author of these pages had no opportunity over the past years of his life to read the pages of Arab Turāth prudently. He is one among thousands of Arab intellectuals, who opened their eyes on European thought -classic and modern- that instilled the belief that it is the only possible human thought; this is because these blinded [us] from seeing any other [possibilities]. This author upheld this attitude too and for [too many] years: Studying European thought as a student, teaching European thought as a professor, reading European thought for entertainment in free time. The Turāth's figures (aʿlām) and schools (mathāhib) did not come to him but as fragments and sporadic echoes, like leery ghosts popping up on his pages."[136]

Known for his eloquence and lucid writing style, Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd captures in very few lines the main "absence" in the dominant modes of Arab thought before 1970s. His recognition that the Turāth continued as an invisible influence in its absence from intellectual discourse made this revelation, arguably, one of the most debated paragraphs in recent Arab thought. Since 1970, Arab intellectuals have changed the way they mobilized, deployed and appropriated the discourse of Turāth. Once seen in a negative light by the majority of the Arab Left, it increasingly gained positive associations in these circles. The negative connotations of Turāth, in its earliest usages, testify to its placement within national-centered discourses. If before the 1970s the Turāth had been subsumed within national discourse as its antithesis, now the tables had turned: the national became the negative other of the Turāth. The main question is why the Turāth was invisible for so many years? How does one explain the late (re)discovery of the Turāth among a growing number of Arab intellectuals?

Maḥmūd's testimony on the Turāth resonates with the debates between Jābirī and Arkoun. Taken together, these debates attest to a significant development within the Arab intellectual scene since the

[136] Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd. *Tajdīd Al-Fikr Al-ʿArabi.* (Beirut: Dar al-Shourūq, 1971), 5.

beginnings of the 1970s. As the writings of these scholars amply demonstrate the Arab Left had begun organizing itself around new themes, rarely explored in the current academic historiography. More than just illustrating a dithering, debilitated Arab Left, these exchanges on the Turāth bear witness to an animated Arab Left in the throes of significant change. Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd's revelation above captures the moment in which the Arab Left began restructuring itself around a new set of problematics, inconceivable a mere decade earlier. The new intellectual groups that formed around and against the question of Turāth suggest that the declarations of a lethargic Arab Left were premature and unsubstantiated.[137] The unmapped polemics explored here, led eventually to the emergence of the *Arab Rationalist Association*, and provide yet more compelling evidence for the importance of revisiting the normative story of Arab Left. Rather than lamenting the divisions and new realignments within the Arab Left as a mark of inherent "weakness" and "inefficiency,"[138] they point to an extraordinary and dynamic conversation that, if fully investigated, defy these significations.

The discovery of the Turāth as an undead past caught many of the Arab Left by surprise, for it came with the recognition that an influential dimension of reality was living on yet unseen and unaccounted for. This "discovery" accelerated the pace of the waning of Arab socialism and the precipitous decline in the numbers of committed Marxists. With the advent of the Turāth discourse, a discourse that ushered in a reckoning about the ways Arabic speakers lead their lives authentically, the Arab Left was conceived on the losing end of this debate. The rebuttal of Western ideologies by Arab Leftists could have meant different things, but for some scholars it only confirmed the hypothesis of the return to Islam in the Arab world.[139] Though this orientalist view had long been discredited, the

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[137] Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Judith Miller, "The Embattled Arab Intellectual." *New York Times*, June 9, 1985, sec. Magazine; ʿAbd Allāh ʿArawī. *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Flora LewisPARIS, "The War on Arab Intellectuals," *New York Times*, September 7, 1993, sec. OP-ED; Bardawil, "When All This Revolution Melts into Air"; Robert F. Worth, "The Arab Intellectuals Who Didn't Roar," *New York Times*, October 30, 2011, sec. Review.

[138] On these descriptions see the introduction in Meir Hatina and Christoph Schumann, eds., *Arab Liberal Thought after 1967: Old Dilemmas, New Perceptions*, First edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[139] Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford [England] ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Charles Philip Issawi, *The Arab World's Legacy: Essays* (Princeton, N.J: Darwin Press, 1981).

alternatives fell short of fully accounting for the Turāth and the added values Arabic speakers placed on it in shaping their political positions.[140]

The story of the Arab Left told here does not abide by a pattern that equates the death of the Arab Left with the passing of the big ideologies and the emergence of Turāth. Instead, the story of the Arab Left presented here begins precisely with the demise of these ideologies (pan-Arabism, socialism, Marxism.) To steer clear of the current scholarship on the death of the Arab Left, one should call into question the assumption that the Arab Left reached its peak in the 1960s and its nadir in the 1980s. With the visible retreat of many Leftists from ideological commitments that both time and political events rendered untenable, the Arab Left was not thrown into disarray but was reinventing itself around new cultural concerns, which reshaped the conversation about authenticity and being. As the Arab Left repositioned itself against the ascending question of the Turāth, the old affiliations/identities of Nationalism, Existentialism, and Marxism outreached itself. Renouncing that system was necessary for the Arab Left's rebirth.

I argue here that the defeat of the Marxist and Pan-Arab ideologies did not expunge the Arab Left nor did it give a boost to the Islamists. The defeat only marked a new intellectual adaptation as the Arab world entered the age of authenticity. The return to roots "*al-Rujūʿ ila al-Juthūr"* was universal among western and non-western societies and by no means uniquely Arab. Yet it represents a response to a whole set of concerns wherein no winners or losers could be found. Nothing could so accurately capture this transition into the age of authenticity as the newfound intellectual conversation on the Turāth. The re-appropriation of, and re-engagement with, the Turāth, and not least of all the intellectual polemics it gave birth to, were a landmark in the emergent intellectual landscape of the post-1970s era. In the wake of this transition, the outdated intellectual fault line between secularists and religious scholars remained in place but lost much of its relevance and explanatory thrust.

[140] Michaelle Browers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World: Accommodation and Transformation*, Cambridge Middle East Studies, 31 (Leiden: Cambridge University Press, 2009), http://www.UTXA.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=442860.

Admittedly, very few intellectual changes have been as groundbreaking in the field of post-1967 Arab thought as the rediscovery of the Turāth.[141] Whether it was manifested as A) the epic collection of Arab historical books in law, theology, jurisdiction, literature and poems, or B) the collective and oral memory, or old practices that seeped into modern Arab peoples' routines and rituals, or C) a tradition of styles of thinking that reflected in the compendiums of Islamic history, enrapture with the Turāth became a marked feature of the new intellectual and public debates and feeling in the last three decades of the twentieth century.[142] Almost instantly the cultural tide toward the Turāth conferred a new identity on the Arab intellectual landscape.

The evident upsurge in scholarly works engaging the Turāth or topics from the Turāth led to a cultural backlash. Jūrj Ṭarābīshī was one of the main voices to subject this cultural drift to a critical analysis. Ṭarābīshī offered genuine psychological explanations for the unexpected turn of the majority of Arab intelligentsia toward the Turāth, while fretting over the cultural dynamics it had unleashed. This chapter empirically examines the intellectual and social contexts in which the Turāth gained traction and popularity before addressing Ṭarābīshī's massive project in response to it in the following chapters. This chapter addresses the fundamental question: where did this discussion begin? Who were its standard-bearers and major propagators? What are the intellectual and social conditions that underlay (and fueled) a renewed preoccupation with the Turāth? How did the Turāth come to bear on questions of politics, society and even modernity? These questions entail a rather expansive look at the formulation of different events and figures who contributed in varied ways in creating the Turāth as a new field of research.

The Shift in Cultural Attitudes

Historically speaking, the engagement with the Turāth question is not utterly new. The term Turāth appeared in the writings of the late nineteenth century *nahḍa* pioneers, whose new editions and printings

[141] Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*, SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[142] Ḥanafī, *Al-Turāth Wa-Al-Tajdīd*; ʿ Abd al-Ilāh Balqazīz, *Naqd Al-Turāth*, al-Ṭab ʿ ah al-ūlá, Al-ʿArab Wa-Al-ḥadāthah 3 (Beirut, Lubnān: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-ʿArabīyah, 2014); Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī, *Naḥnu Wa-Al-Turāth: Qirā'āt Muʿāṣirah Fī Turāthinā Al-Falsafī*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1980); Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Min Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Riddah: Tamazzuqāt Al-Thaqāfah Al-ʿArabīyah Fī ʿaṣr Al-ʿawlamah*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Sāqī, 2000).

of classic Arabic manuscripts launched a new interest in the Turāth.[143] The tense encounter with Europe and the "rediscovery of Europe"[144] during the nineteenth century prompted Arab intellectuals (mostly ʿUlama) to look into their cultural heritage. While many medieval manuscripts and documents slowly began seeing the light for the first time during this period, the vast majority of these forgotten manuscripts remained buried until the next century. Remarkably, Western Orientalists played a dual role that informed the process by which Arab intellectuals discovered their own Turāth. Not only did orientalists assume an active role in unearthing these priceless manuscripts that made Arab history legible, but they also helped define the main contours and shapes of Arab history.[145] It was not until the late 1970s, however, that the Turāth took on a new form and meaning, transforming from a mere intellectual *ihtimām* (interest) to a discourse that bears on political and cultural problematics (*Ishkāliyya Thaqāfiyyah-Siyasiyyah*.) How did this happen?

Long the private and exclusive domain of the religious and quasi-religious scholars (ʿUlama,), the Turāth was conceived primarily a source for scholars of Arabic grammar, synthetics, poetry, and above all Islamic jurisprudence. Islamic institutes were seen by everyone (Islamists and nationalists) as the primary and natural sites for poring over the study of the Turāth. Secular and nationalist intellectuals, on the other hand, rebuffed any engagement with the Turāth, viewing it as a hindrance to the secular path.[146] The gap between the seculars/nationalists and the religious men was almost unbridgeable. Each focusing on his own domain, they rarely shared a common intellectual platform or agenda. Yet, by the beginning of the 1970s, their common concern over the undead past ended almost a century of remoteness. Commenting on a specific case study in Saudi Arabia, one historian observed that "'ulama and intellectuals simply were not speaking the same language. While the former dealt with medieval treatises on theology

[143] Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007). Joseph Andoni Massad, "Al-'irth al-mudamir li-libiraliyyin al-ʿarab," *Al-Akhbar.com*, January 24, 2015, http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/229883.
[144] Ibrahim A. Abu-Lughod. *Arab Rediscovery of Europe; a Study in Cultural Encounters*, Oriental Studies Series, no. 22 (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1963).
[145] For a work that commends Orientalists' work in the Middle East, see the interesting thoughts of Arkoun in Mohammed Arkoun's *Al-Istishrāq bayna duʿātihi wa Maʿāriḍīh*. al-Ṭabʿah al-ʿArabīyah. (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 1994).
[146] Maḥmūd, *Tajdid Al-Fikr Al-Arabi*. On the Turath as a "sign of backwardness" see p.12 and Chapter two "Obstacles on the Road."

and law, the latter were promoting concepts such as "modernity" (hadatha) and "development" (tanmiya) unknown to their counterparts. As a result, no debate between the two groups was possible."[147]

Indeed, before the beginning of the 1970s, secularists brushed aside any engagement with the Turāth, finding their calling in translating western thought into Arabic. Their vision was directed toward questions of modernity or *Hadatha*: how to assimilate modernity and instill modern ways into Arab societies. The only path to achieve that goal, nationalist intellectuals believed, was through disparaging the Turāth and its order altogether.[148] This dismissive attitude towards the Turāth was a direct result of a century of social and cultural changes, as Nafi and Farouki affirmed, "the ulma were rapidly losing much of their economic and cultural capital, as modern schoolteachers, lawyers, engineers, journalists, government officials, army officers and politicians, and even actors and actresses, speaking new languages and promoting different ideals, crowded the social field."[149] Significantly, ever since its emergence, the Turāth carried a negative association: it signified a dark past that must be forgotten, old and entrenched habits that inhibit modern citizenry, superficial and timeworn styles of thinking, and metaphysical Islamic thoughts that prevent Arab societies from embracing new models of socialization. For Arab nationalists, the Turāth, which makes sectarian and religious distinctions more pronounced, works against the very idea of nationhood that strove to cancel out linguistic and ethnic differences among citizens. In its place, Arab secularists and nationalists embraced Western revolutionary ideologies. During the first years after independence, 1945-1970, Marxism, nationalism and socialism commanded uncontested authority that defined the prevalent condescending attitude towards the Turāth. National Arab intellectuals' resolution to steer clear of the Turāth was not a diktat, but rather emanated from a common understanding reflecting the spirit of the time.

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[147] Stéphane Lacroix and George Holoch, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 24.

[148] One of the intellectuals to develop this attitude of the past and Turath is Yassin al-Hafiz. Yāsīn Ḥāfiẓ. *Hazīmah Wa-Al-īdyūlūjiyā Al-Mahzūmah*. Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah lil-Ṭibāʿah wa-al-Nashr, 1979). See the discussion in chapter three.

[149] See the co-authored introduction on the decline of the ulama class and the rise of the Islamically committed intelligentsia in speaking on behalf of Islam. Suha Taji-Farouki, Basheer M. Nafi, and Institute of Ismaili Studies, eds., *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 6–7.

In light of this thorough aversion to the Turāth, one might not expect many seculars and nationalists coming to terms with the Turāth. Yet, this is precisely what transpired in the course of the 1970s and more intensely after the 1980s. More and more secular writers broached the Turāth with original research questions and developed full-fledged projects that directly embraced the Turāth rather than skip over it. This singular shift in themes and tropes signaled a rapture marked by the expansion of a field. As Lacroix argued in his investigation of Arabia, "an intellectual field had indeed come into being."[150]

Many works published during this decade (1970) attest to this dramatic transition. The eminent Syrian poet Adonis (Adūnīs) whose work engaged poetry from the Turāth, is perhaps the best-known, but by no means the only case in the Levant. Adonis *al-Thābit wal-Mutaḥaūil* 1973 (continuity and Change) was bewildering in light of his previously celebrated radical writings that rebelled against the Turāth. This work perhaps rises to Freud's notion of a "literary event" that presaged a shift in the dynamics and tastes of Arab intellectuals toward the Turāth. In this work, Adonis looked to the formative centuries of Islam to distill the nature (or what he termed as ethos) that governs poetic taste in Arab culture. He argues that the Turāth's ideas of conformity and continuity had been valorized and prioritized over ideas of creativity and innovation.[151]

In the same year, Egyptian writer and committed materialist Ghālī Shukrī addressed the Turāth in his book, *al-Turāth wal-Thawrah*. With this title, the once paraxodical ideas of Turāth and Revolution became compatible within mainstream intellectual discourse. Many Marxists and seculars followed suit, enhancing the same trend. Lebanese Marxist Ḥusayn Murūwah published a work on Islamic history by seizing on materialist tools in his analysis of the formation of the first Islamic community. Three years before Murūwah's seminal work, Syrian preeminent Marxist Tayyib Tīzīnī published his first volume (of twelve) in 1976, offering a materialist reading of the Turāth. Not only Marxists wrote on the Turāth, but also avid liberals like Egyptian Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, who in 1975 published his first work on Arab heritage

[150] Lacroix and Holoch, *Awakening Islam*, 19.
[151] Adonis reiterated these ideas in 2009. See Adūnīs, *Al-Kitāb Al-Khiṭāb Al-ḥijāb: Dirāsah*. Beirutt: Dār al-Ādāb, 2009).

after years of writings on western philosophy.[152] The change in literary tastes and intellectual frameworks had never been more obvious.

Reviewing the history of the Arabic book during the 1970s, one Arab intellectual noticed with sorrow the turn to the Turāth. The newly installed intellectual trends, he argued, are both lamentable and worrisome. They reflect a substantial "decline in creativity" [*hubūt al-Qīmah al-Ibdaʿiyyah*/ that plagued Arab publications during this decade as Beirut replaced Cairo as the epicenter of Arab scholarly publication. Writing in 1983, Bashīr al-Hāshimī maintained that "most of the books and publications during the seventies do not reflect new additions in terms of general culture. But they come to digress on previously extant literature in one way or another. One can possibly argue that even highly significant books and publications of this time are tied to *old themes* and expressed *past time conditions*."[153]

Hāshimī views the new writings on the Turāth as a dangerous "degradation" in the quality of Arab thought. While baffled by the new intellectual trends of the 1970s, his bewilderment rarely led him to offer an explanation beyond passing condemning judgments about the emerging Arab intellectual landscape. The question of why so many secular intellectuals who previously denounced the Turāth and antagonized any treatment of its literary corpuses wrought up embracing it, barely finds its resolution. Yet, his observations on the new trends in Arab thought remain valid and significant.

Undead past: The Rediscovery of the Turāth

The realization that Arab cultural heritage resists its demise was disheartening for many intellectuals. In particular, the discovery of the Turāth afforded a moment of disenchantment for the Arab Left, whose assumption that the Turāth had longed perished proved a dangerously misguided hypothesis. Though belatedly, the realization of the Turāth's centrality opened their eyes to account for a new dimension of reality that they had long thought insignificant. When it slowly dawned on these intellectuals

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[152] Adūnīs. *Al-Thābit Wa-Al-Mutaḥaūil: Baḥth Fī Al-Ittibāʿ Wa-Al-Ibdāʿ ʿinda Al-ʿArab*. (Bierut: Dār al-Fikr, 1986); Ṭayyib Tīzīnī. *Min Al-Turāth Ilá Al-Thawrah: ḥawla Naẓarīyah Muqtaraḥah Fī Qaḍīyat Al-Turāth Al-ʿArabī*, Mashrūʿ Ruʿyah Jadīdah Lil-Fikr Al-ʿArabī Mundhu Bidāyatihi ḥattá Al-Marḥalah Al-Muʿāṣirah (Bierut: Dār al-Jīl, 1976); Ghali Shukri, *Al-Turath wal-Thawra* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿah, 1979); Ḥusayn Murūwah. *Al-Nuzʿāt Al-Māddīyah Fī Al-Falsafah Al-ʿArabīyah Al-Islāmīyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Farābī, 1978). Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, *Al-Maʿqūl Wa-Al-Lā-Maʿqūl Fī Turāthinā Al-Fikrī* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Shurūq, 1975)See also Ḥanafī; Jābirī, *Naḥnu Wa-Al-Turāth*.

[153] Al-Hāshimī Bashir, "Wāqiʿ Al-Kitāb Al-ʿArabī Fī Al-Sabʿīnāt Wa-Afāqihi Fī Al-Thamanīnāt.," *Majalat Al-Bayan al-kuwītiyah*, March 1, 1983. http://archive.sakhrit.co.

that the Turāth is not even in the past, they began changing their writing and styles of reasoning. Even publishing houses had to make some changes and adaptations to the old patterns of printing in order to accommodate new cultural tastes. One vibrant publishing house in Lebanon that gained much esteem was Dār al-Taliʿah. Established in 1959, al-Taliʿah is credited for introducing its readers to countless western works in Arabic. The mouthpiece of radical and revolutionary intellectuals, al-Taliʿah played an integral role in molding the ideas of an entire generation of scholars on Western philosophy, notably Marxism and Freudianism. Significantly, during its first two decades of operation, al-Taliʿah published only one book on Turāth. By the beginning of the 1970s, however, more and more books on the Turāth began to appear in this adamantly secular publication. In 1977, al-Taliʿah found itself goaded by cultural powers to launch a new series called "contemporary Arab Turāth" that would meet public needs and ensure the press kept abreast with the new intellectual trends of the Arab world.[154]

Yet, the advent of the Turāth was not completely new. The engagement with the Turāth set to begin at the first decade of the twentieth century with the publication of Faraḥ Antūn's *Ibn Rushd wa-Falsafatihi* in 1903. Antūn, one of the leading figures of the *nahḍa*, returned to the study of the Turāth to respond and refute French orientalist Ernest Renan, whose *Averroes et l'averroïsme* 1866 established the claim that Arabs were only translators and carriers of Greek philosophy with little original philosophical thought of their own. [155] In his response Antūn had to reread the philosophical writings of the long disregarded and unappreciated Ibn Rushd in order to articulate Arab intellectuals' answer to Renan's accusations. Antūn's revisiting of classical philosophy however, was the first bird that heralded and established a new tradition in modern Arab thought. This tradition interested in combining rational philosophy and classical Islam, while evading the old ways of writing on the Turāth through Islamic law

[154] Al-Taliʿah editorial (Document), "Dār Al-Taliʿah: Qā'mat Al-Manshurat Al-Kamilah: 1959-1999" (al-Taliʿah, n.d.), 1959–199.

[155] This work was the first of its kind to account for rationalism and rationality in the *Turath*. Though the author is clearly influenced by the teaching of French Orientalist Ernest Renan who denies the existence of any original philosophy in the Islamic world, Antun proves that rationalism as manifested in Ibn Rushd's writings was not merely a translation of Greek philosophy as Renan shows, but also a genuine modification and new application of that philosophy. In other words, philosophy is not foreign but inherent to Arab history. See: Faraḥ Anṭūn and Muḥammad ʿAbduh. *Ibn Rushd Wa-Falsafatuhu* (Alexandria, 1903) Publishers is not available.

and theology. This work was commonly lauded as the first genuine study of the Turāth because it utilized a new topic (rationalism) and appropriated an unfamiliar method (philology).[156]

A few years later, in 1911, Lebanese polymath Jūrjī Zaydān published his epic *Tārīkh al-Tamadun*, which elaborated on the reading and methods of the Turāth that Antūn had started.[157] Zaydān, however, did not confine his interest to one Islamic aspect of the Turāth (rational philosophy), instead he offered to account for a variety of social aspects of Arab culture. In a manner that recalls Norbert Elias' *Western Civilization*, Zaydān writes on the ways Arab culture refined its manners and behavior over the centuries. In his multi-volume work, he provides a sparkling portrayal of the multifaceted ways of eating, drinking, dancing, seating postures, shopping and haggling in bazaars, and scores of other daily practices. Underlining "profane aspects" in Islamic history was groundbreaking since these daily life errands and pursuits seemed inconsequential to the Islamic law.

Even if Antūn and Zaydān mapped new directions and tapped into unexplored themes in the Turāth, their works fall short of establishing a new tradition of scholarship in the Arab world. They signaled the beginning of a new interests that faded away after their deaths. One Arab reader commented that Antūn offered only a "fragmentary cultural history" of rationalism in Islam, while Zaydān offered a "comprehensive cultural history" of Muslim daily life. These two works only stood out because they focused on new topics from the Turāth that had long been discarded while playing down the traditional focus on Islam and Islamic law. However, despite being forerunners in establishing the study of the Turāth, they did not succeed in creating a field of study with clear themes and definitions.[158]

The question of the Turāth was taken up by the second generation of the *nahḍa*, a generation that struggled to liberate it from the grasp of traditional ʿulama. Yet, despite the new explorations on hitherto unknown aspects of the Turāth, the field remained securely dominated by religious scholars. One of the most significant figures of this generation to challenge ʿulama's grip on the Turāth was Taha Husayn (Hussain). With the publication of his masterpiece *Fī al-Shiʿr al-Jāhilī* in 1926, Hussain stirred both

[156] Balqazīz, *Naqd Al-Turāth*.
[157] Jūrjī Zaydān and Ḥusayn Mū'nis. *Tārīkh Al-Tamaddun Al-Islāmī* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1958).
[158] Balqazīz, *Naqd Al-Turāth*, 81–86.

excitement and anxiety as he raised fundamental questions regarding the spurious Islamic narratives underpinned by unsubstantiated truths. In this work Hussain amounted an attack on the truth regimes in Islamic history and denied the factuality of much of the Islamic historical writings. In particular, Hussain argued that all the knowledge and negative associations Muslims assigned to the "pre-Islamic world" were forged and recreated under Islamic rule with the preconceived intention of demonizing life before the emergence of Islam. Doubting the integrity of the dominant Islamic narratives, Hussain soon faced a social and political backlash that forced him to rescind, or at least modify, his radical conclusions.

Hussain's contemporaries however, namely ʿAbbās Mahmūd ʿAqqād[159] and Muhammad Husayn Haykal,[160] followed in a slightly different path by focusing primarily on literary history. The historical novels these intellectuals circulated established new bridges with the Turāth. Literary history, one scholar observed, "creates continuities" with the past, and in the process "confer[s] legitimacy" on that romanticized past.[161] The "historical novels" published by these Egyptian scholars augmented the status of the Turāth and prompted many among their followers to ask whether these two scholars had established new bridges with the Turāth. This take on these two scholars differed from the heated historiographical debates among Western historians regarding the orientation of these historical novels.[162] However, despite conferring new meaning on the Turāth, the scholars of the *nahḍa* were less compelled by investigations of the Turāth than the introduction of Western ideas.[163] In fact, their works on the Turāth had an undiminished teleological bent and lacked a binding theme and guiding questions essential to setting up

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159 ʿAbbās Maḥmūd ʿAqqād. *ʿAbqarriyat: Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ* (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-ʿUrūbah, [1965], 1965).

160 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, al-Ṭabʿah 7 (S.l.: Dār al-Qalam, 1960).

161 Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés, eds., *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Introduction.

162 Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: Abiography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983) I. Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930*, Studies in Middle Eastern History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); I. Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community; an Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804-1952*, Harvard Middle Eastern Studies 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

163 Some scholars have argued that the introduction of Western theories in Arabic had compelled Arab intellectuals to discover their past. See in particular: Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Omnia S. El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007).

an independent field for studies of the Turāth. If so many Arab intellectuals had written in one way or another on the Turāth since the beginning of the century, then why did it not emerge as a compelling topic of inquiry and field of study until the last three decades of the 20th century?

To address this question one should turn to look at the social and political transformations that forced the Turāth as a dominant framework on Arab intellectuals. While the Turāth was always there, it only existed as an "absence" and a "negative" while intellectuals busied themselves with western ideas. I argue that the notion of the Turāth as a problematic *Ishkaliyya*, namely a self-reliant theme that bears on political and existential questions with social and religious repercussions, was born, most saliently, in the 1970s as the Arab world entered a new age of authenticity. Of all the diverse manifestations of Arab authenticity, the Turāth seems to undeniably represent its most accurate expression. Much debated, highly complex and multifaceted, the idea of authenticity emerged to fend off against the sweeping modernity that rippled through Arab society, altering its 'authentic' mores and values, and radically upsetting entrenched modes of belonging. Within Arab intellectual discourse, the secular was the ultimate antonym for authenticity. More than the nationalist, the secular depended on translations and on borrowing an alternative set of modern models from the West, to keep his identity coherent. The notion of authenticity meant to repulse against this by reverting to a genuine Arab Turāth in search of an authentic model to fit Arab particularity.[164]

Even though previous scholars engaged diverse aspects of the Turāth, not until the late 1970s did the vast majority of Arab seculars become aware of the value and centrality of the Turāth to their projects- a theme that subsumed the battle not only about the past, but also about the narrative of the future. As Jābirī had convincingly demonstrated in 1984, the way the Turāth is conceived has a direct bearing on how people behave in the present and plan for the future.[165] With these newfound truths, secular and revolutionary scholars' willingness to engage the Turāth in their scholarship, has never been so indispensable. Their intervention in the Turāth, however, not only exponentially diversified the

[164] Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Al-Turāth Wa-Al-Tajdīd: Mawqifunā Min Al-Turāth Al-Qadīm*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (al-Qāhirah: al-Markaz al-ʿArabī lil-Baḥth wa-al-Nashr, 1980).
[165] Mohammad ʿAbed al-Jabiri. *Takwīn al-ʿaql al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah. 1984).

perspectives (and takes) on the subject but also revolutionized the field. These newcomers had expanded Turāth studies quantitatively and qualitatively, re-establishing the idea of Turāth anew. Questioning the Turāth, it turns out, inspired new topics and themes in its course.

Arab intellectuals' recourse to the Turāth came as an answer to a new reality of increased theology and piety. The new commitment to study the Turāth, after a long period of disregard, unambiguously demonstrates the impossibility of making social progress without first deconstructing the Turāth, a burden that slowed their way to *Hadatha*. Less than a decade after the defeat in 1967, the Turāth began to emerge as the new battleground for religious and non-religious intellectuals. This turn toward the Turāth was attended to by western epistemological tools (hermeneutics, literary analysis, and psychoanalysis,) effecting a genuine earthquake in the works and perspectives of many Arab intellectuals. The study of the Turāth, to sum up, has not only signaled the end of religious scholars' hold on the field. With the establishment of Turāth, new research possibilities came into being, not least of which were the emergence of new conceptualizations of rationality, secularism, the rise of new types of intellectuals not only in the centers of Arab culture, but mostly "from the historically marginalized regions of the Arab world."[166]

The Creation of a Framework

The return to the Turāth did not only occur at the discursive level. Rather, many social transformations helped sustain the cultural trend towards the Turāth. The epistemic authority of the Turāth derives from a constellation of political, social, and institutional considerations that have unfolded since the 1970s. To demonstrate the ways in which the Turāth drew more attention, one should move away from discourse analysis and focus on examining how these discourses were reflecting in reality. A unique set of political events, institutional developments, and social changes combined to prop up the Turāth as a major framework that intellectuals could no longer ignore. To discuss these factors, I turn to examine four developments: 1- The Archival breakthrough: the exhuming, editing and publication of substantial documents and works unknown in the nineteenth century- an intellectual enterprise that was taken most earnestly by Egyptian writer ʿAbd al-Rahman Badawī. 2- Institutional: the proliferation of a publishing

[166] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 234.

industry concerned with ideas of unity, nationalism and authenticity. 3- The rise of new types of intellectuals: the emergence of a new class of intellectuals infatuated with Turāth studies- the case of Mohamad Jābirī. 4- The eclipse and erosion of the traditional hubs of intellectual thought in the Arab world especially following the destruction of cities like Beirut with the onslaught of the Lebanese civil war. The conflation of all these factors set into motion cultural dynamics that sustained the restoration of the Turāth, making it almost inevitable.

The Archival Breakthrough

Against all odds, it was secular intellectuals rather than Islamist scholars who gave rise to the Turāth as a field of study. Islamists continued to adhere to one aspect of the Turāth, the *fiqh* or jurisprudence, while disregarding its other significant aspects. Many observers maintained that the Egyptian publishing industry played a vital role in establishing the field of Turāth. In particular, many had credited eminent Egyptian writer ʿAbed al-Ruhman Badawī for overseeing a national project that aimed at editing and publishing different works from the "million manuscripts" of the Turāth. In *Naqd al-Turāth*, Moroccan writer ʿAbd al-ʾIlah Balqazīz attributes the inauguration of the Turāth as a field to "one figure who stood out above all of his generation in bringing the Turāth to the fore": the Egyptian philosopher ʿAbed al-Ruhman Badawi. In a very detailed chapter, Balqazīz salutes Badawī for supervising the creation of a field: "one man worked meticulously to match the work of an entire institution."[167]

Balqazīz offers one of the most comprehensive accounts yet for the emergence of and the growing engagement with Turāth in contemporary Arab thought. Though he fails to see the Turāth as a new field of study, Balqazīz's analysis is significant. He argues that the Turāth as a "*subject"* appeared in the late 19th century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. He continues that starting in the late 1960s, Turāth studies began to establish itself as a "*theme*."[168] Namely, even if writing on the Turāth reaches back as early as the late nineteenth-century, it was yet "*unthinkable*" to consider the Turāth as a theme before the late 1960s, Balqazīz asserts. Egyptian writer Badawī, whom Balqazīz showers with compliments, was a mid-century student of philosophy, a pre-eminent graduate of Cairo University when most of its faculty

[167] ʿAbd al-Ilāh Balqazīz. *Naqd Al-Turāth*. Beirut, Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-ʿArabīyah 2014. P. 97–134
[168] Balqazīz, 78–84.

consisted of classical Orientalists.[169] His two main professors were Taha Hussain and ʿAbed al-Rāziq, the only two Arab faculty professors at Cairo University at the first decades of the twentieth century. "No other scholar of Arab history and Islamic thought, modern and contemporary, has written as much as ʿAbed al-Ruhman Badawi" writes Balqazīz. Badawī is credited with supervising the most extensive project on the Turāth, which brought to light much of the archival manuscripts on Arab Turāth.[170] Badawī applied a philological method to his research on the Turāth that helped him in the editing, proof-reading and publishing of a great deal of literature hitherto unknown to many Arab writers. "Badawi was working like an Arab orientalist" Balqazīz writes. By midcentury it became increasingly clear that nineteenth-century knowledge of the body of work of the Turāth was tiny and insignificant, dwarfed by the greater discoveries of oceanic manuscripts unknown to previous generations. For Balqazīz the editing, copy editing, and rewriting of this extensive material during the nineteenth century was only the tip of the submerged iceberg. With the beginning of the twentieth century, the massive treasures of Arab Turāth material were still buried and awaited the skills of Badawī to bring them to light. Not only did Badawī bring to light unknown works by al-Ghazāli, Ibn al-Nadim and other significant figure from Islamic past, but he also successfully established new writing on topics no one before him dared to broach, such as his well-known work on *The History of Atheism in Islam*. The number of classic books, in Sufism, *Kalam*, and science, brought to light by Badawī amount to a genuine establishment of modern philosophy of Turāth studies, according to Balqazīz. Comparing Badawī's work with those of other eminent Egyptian scholars of the previous generation, Balqazīz writes, "If [Egyptian writer] Ahmed Amin's eight volumes "Fajir al-Islam" pursued a comprehensive history of Islamic jurisprudence beside rational sciences, and if ʿAbed al-Raziq pursued a search of Islamic rationalism, then Badawī's was the first to search for the history of sciences and philosophy and reason in Islam."[171] Balqazīz leaves the impression that the Turāth as a field of study was "impossible" before Badawī's multi-volumes and works that he helped edit and

[169] For a discussion of Badawi's teachers and intellectual career, see Yoav Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (October 1, 2012): 1061–91. On the faculty of Cairo University see: *Donald M. Reid. Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Cambridge Middle East Library 23 (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[170] On the list of works Badawi edited see Balqazīz, *Naqd Al-Turāth*, 97.
[171] Balqazīz, 105.

publish. With Badawī, the efforts made by nineteenth century scholars now viewed by twentieth-century intellectuals only as hesitant beginnings that brought to light Arab manuscripts. While significant works like those of Ibn Khaldun, were discovered during the nineteenth century, many of the most significant writers and Islamic philosophers remained forgotten.[172]

Tunisian historian, ʿAbed al-Majīd al-Sharafī affirms this conclusion in his book *Taḥdith al-Fikr al-Islami*. For Sharafī, only when one comprehends the scale and range of classical Arabic books that were rediscovered and edited for the first time between the 1930s and 1970s, does one begin to appreciate how the Turāth started to develop as a field: "The last thirty years has witnessed the publication of a significant number of primary sources, so that the reassessment process of the old jurisprudence became feasible only now." Sharafī adds, "Among these valuable sources that had been published since 1965 one can point to al-Muʿtamad fi ʻUsual al-fikh for the Motazilite Abi Husayn al-Basri, ʻUsul al-Sarkhasi, al Burhan by Jouini, al-Mankhul by Ghazali, Ahkam al-Fusul by Baji, Mizan al-ʻUsual by Samarkundi, al-Mahsul by Razi, al-Hasil wal-Mahsul by Armaui, al-Tamhid by Kalwadhani, and probably the last sources to be published was al-Ibhaj fi sharh al-manahij by Sabki. This list is by no means comprehensive."[173] Even if some scholars had previously aspired to edit the "million manuscripts" sitting in the archives, this mission only became possible in the second half of the twentieth century. These new publications brought fresh insights and understandings of past Islamic cultural history that increased the value of the Turāth.

The Center for Arab Unity

Badawī's outstanding work of exhuming valuable Turāth texts and the publication of new editions of unknown texts did not go beyond a preliminary survey and mapping of old texts. Badawī played an undeniable role in tapping into important texts of the Turāth, his primary contribution was in making Arabic texts available and accessible to the Arabic reader. Yet, his editions were not immune to his ethical judgments as he emitted and erased unbecoming textual works that include "sexual contents" that he and

[172] Farah Antun has complained as late as 1903 that while Ibn Rushd's medical books are available in Arabic his "philosophical works are rare." He expressed a bafflement that if one wishes "to attain Ibn Rushd's philosophical works in Arabic is impossible…if you seek them in Latin or Hebrew, European big libraries rarely lacked them." See: Anṭūn and Muḥammad ʻAbduh, *Ibn Rushd Wa-Falsafatuhu*, 85–86.

[173] ʻAbd al-Majīd Sharafī. *Taḥdīth Al-Fikr Al-Islāmī*, Munāẓarāt (al-Dār al-Bayḍā', al-Maghrib: Nashr al-Fanak, 1998), 26.

his team deemed inappropriate or morally corrupt.[174] The Turāth as a scholarly field began to loom large due to the proliferation of new cultural institutions seeking Arab authenticity. The creation of the Center for Arab Unity Studies, one of the most important cultural institutions the modern Arab world has ever known, was exceedingly important in this regard. Presiding over the most significant conferences of the last three decades, the home of thousands of intellectuals, the Center has turned in few years into a dominant powerhouse for exchanging ideas.[175]

With its establishment in March 1975, very few could have appreciated that this intellectual edifice would change the intellectual conversation in the Arab World. The Center was created only a month before the Civil War in Lebanon, when sectarian tensions boiled to the point of explosion. Because many publishing houses shut their doors, hardly anyone could have anticipated its weight and epistemic sway over the new paths intellectual debates would take. Nonetheless, within a few years of its establishment the Center had become an indispensable instrument in steering the debates toward the Turāth. Though the idea of Turāth did not figure into the "outline and principles of the declaration," of the Center, the Center nevertheless took up the Turāth due to the underlining ideology of its members. From its inception, the Center was conceived to bring to life the now waning idea of Arab unity. Guided by this principle, the Center gave priority to "original writing [read: authentic] over translations, and non-controversial issues over more sharply contentious issues"[176] This agenda that presumed to pander to the most basic common denominator, predestined the Center's orientation toward the Turāth.

As its name implies, the Center for Arab Unity was an immediate response to the fading idea of pan-Arab nationalism. Conceived by hard-core socialists and myriad secular intellectuals and publishers who came together to repel the onslaught on their ideology, the Center's doctrines and principles were articulated against the death of Nassir, Egyptian leader who held the banner of Arab nationalism for almost two decades. At its core the Center was an intellectual endeavor to resuscitate the idea of Arab unity

[174] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.
[175] Khair El-Din Haseeb, "The Centre for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS) Has Passed Its 35th Anniversary: 'Where There Is a Will, There Is a Way!,'" *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 159–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/17550912.2013.793040.
[176] "THE CENTRE FOR ARAB UNITY STUDIES," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (1987): 22–24.

against the unfolding reality of increasing division among Arab states.[177] None of its founders, however, could have predicted that this institution would grow in such importance as to bend Arab thought in the direction of the Turāth. When the thirty-two authors and writers convened in Beirut to declare its foundation, what they had in mind was to assert the vitality of Arab Unity. Bashir al-Daouk, the founder of Dār al-Taliʿah was among the signatories. Suhayl Idriss, the owner and founder of Dār al-Ādāb publishing house, also played a fundamental role in putting together the logistics to facilitate the creation of this Center. Yet the presence of these two publishers who preferred "translated literature" could not erase the edge that the two co-founders of the Center had. Khair al-Dīnn Ḥassīb and Saʿdūn Ḥamādi were invested in the study of Arab history and the way this history shapes current political and economic conditions. Though both of them had a steep history with al-Taliʿah and Dār al-Ādāb, a history that reaches back to the early 1950s, Ḥassīb and Ḥamādi made it clear that this institute primarily prioritizes works on the Arab Turāth written by Arab scholars.

The rise of the Center affords a rare window through which to examine the ways in which the Turāth percolated Arab intellectual debates. By ideologically underscoring authentic ideas over translated and "imported" ones, the Center was poised from its inception to look back into Arab history for ideas that could be grafted to modern conditions. This orientation set the Center to revive and invigorate the discourse around Turāth. Though the Center was born with no particular identity outside of its concern with the idea of Arab unity, its restoration of the Turāth endowed it with its true identity. This happened for a very simple reason: Starting in the 1990s, the Center was increasingly filled with a new type of intellectuals who channeled the publication of this institution toward their intellectual tastes.

One of the most salient figures entering the ranks of the Center was Mohammad ʿAbed al-Jābirī. Thanks to the Center, Jābirī became a celebrity. His original research on the Turāth cannot be separated from the Center. Indeed, a marriage between the two seemed natural. When Jābirī took over the Center,

[177] Kassab shows that the Center presided over one of the most important conferences to take place in the last few decades "Heritage and the Challenges of the Age in the Arab Homeland" in 1984. See Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 150–151.

many of his adversaries described this move as "hijacking", an act that presaged a genuine integration of the Turāth in the Center.

Building on the Turāth: Mohammad ʿAbed al-Jābirī

In the Summer of 1970, five years before the establishment of the Center, Morocco celebrated the graduation of its first Ph.D. student from the University of Mohammad V, previously Rabat University (est.1957). The new young graduate, Mohammad ʿAbed Al- Jābirī, came to symbolize the new type of intellectual to which the Moroccan educational system had given birth. An intellectual who conceived of himself as "breaking a new middle ground" between Islamists and their enchantment with the Turāth and modernists who looked past the Turāth and blindly emulated the West. Jābirī did not dismiss these two groups out of hand; rather, he utilized western analytical tools to demystify the Turāth. Yet, his misgivings on Islamists and modernists fostered his need to fashion a *third way*.

Though many scholars have attempted to bridge the gap between Islamists and modernists, the most prominent example being Egyptian philosopher Khaled Mohammad Khaled,[178] it was not before Jābirī's works in late 1979 that a third way was conceivable. In his works, Jābirī hacked secularists and prepared the ground for reclaiming the Turāth from Islamists. At the beginning of the 1980s, with his rise to stardom and authority, Jābirī brought new interests (past is future), different tastes (Islamic rational heritage) and disposition to the study of the field of Turāth. Though it is hard to suggest that Jābirī forced the Turāth on the Arab intellectual landscape, it is also absurd to overlook his fundamental role in veering the research toward the Turāth, which he investigated in multiple works. Nonetheless, once Jābirī built ties with the Center, tightening his control over its publications, he successfully navigated contemporary Arab thought in directions he desired. His unmistakable penchant toward the study of the Turāth helped enhance the growing obsession with the Turāth.[179]

Jābirī was born in 1936 in Figuig, a town in southeastern Morocco. For a brief period of time he attended religious school in his village before moving to Casablanca, where he attended state school. His most definite socialization took place in the national era when uncertainty shrouded Morocco's future.

[178] Khalid Muhammad Khalid, *Min huna nabda* ([Cairo]: Maktabah al-Anglo-al-Misriyyah, 1969).
[179] ʿAziz al-ʿAzmeh has attested that "Jabiri has succeeded in twisting the *Center* from publishing any works by Tarabishi."

Growing up under the Moroccan national movement instilled in young Jābirī some indelible nationalist feelings. The Moroccan national movement developed along different lines than those of the Levant, molding Jābirī's intellectual tastes. Unlike the ethnic-linguistic nationalism of the Fertile Crescent, North African nationalism in general had an irreducible Islamic tinge. This nationalism was an inevitable outcome of the nature of the population that dwelled in this region: Arabs and Berbers shared a common religion that rendered Islam into a unifying background. As Ibrahim Abu-Lughod rightly observed, "The bifurcation of society along ethnic lines, Arabs and Berbers, made Islam the basis of social and political cohesion"[180] in the Maghreb. This was not the case in the Fertile Crescent, where the presence of Christians, Alawites, Druz, and others remained noticeable, particularly in cities where ideas of nationalism emerged and germinated. For Abu Lughod, the "reasons for this difference" between these modes of Arab nationalism lay in the "presence of an active and articulate Christian minority" that was absent in North African scene. "When the national movement in Syria and Lebanon developed it had assumed principles which necessitated a basis for identification that was not heavily religious in content." The absence of a substantial Christian community in North Africa freed them "to evolve their Arab nationalism on a strictly religious basis."[181] It is not surprising, therefore, that "North Africans viewed Islam as their bastion of strength. All hope of success lay in the rehabilitation of Islam to serve as a basis for national unity. As a consequence, the encounter [with the colonial French] produced an even greater degree of clinging to Islam than would normally have occurred."[182] Jābirī kept this nationalism close to his heart. It was through his national activism that he embarked on a writing career. Working under Mehdi Ben Baraka, Morocco's national leading figure, Jābirī began writing daily in the nationalist journal, al-ʿAlām. During these years, Jābirī was indoctrinated in Islamic nationalism, which continued to exert influence on his intellectual tastes.

Coming of age during a wave of national feeling, Jābirī's identity was cast on a national idea that did not undervalue Islamic components. In fact, the national unity in Morocco was only possible because

[180] Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "Retreat from the Secular Path? Islamic Dilemmas of Arab Politics," *The Review of Politics* 28, no. 4 (1966): 447–76.
[181] Abu-Lughod, 457.
[182] Abu-Lughod, 458.

it was founded on this mixture of nationalism and Islam. Growing up within the walls of the national movement, Jābirī appreciated Islam so much that even during the 1970s, when his career began to flourish, Jābirī could not toss away his Islamic socialization and habitus. Indeed, this socialization shaped his discontent toward other forms of secular nationalism, particularly in the Levant, which downplayed Islam's role in the cultural identity of contemporary Arab world.

Jābirī viewed the cultural supremacy of the Levant in articulating intellectual discourses, buttressed by a developed network of publications and universities, as the source of the current intellectual crisis in the post-colonial state. Noticing that very few North African voices were featured in Beirut, Jābirī saw himself as articulating alternatives to the dominant ideological discourse that emanated in the Levant. "During the seventies al-Jabiri began publishing a series of papers on Islamic thought that immediately drew the attention of many intellectuals and academics in the Arab world, including for the first time those of the Levant." [183] These articles formed the basis for his first book, which resonated with many Arab intellectuals, conferring on him an unprecedented reach and unheard-of authority.[184] Soon Jābirī contacted the Center, severing his connections with Dar al-Taliʿah, with which he published all of his first works. Jābirī did not directly call for disengagement with the cultural hub of Beirut, but in these works he called for a renewal of Arab discourse away from the assumptions that found their basis in the hubris of Beirut's seculars.

In 1979, Jābirī published *Nahnu wa al-Turath* and a couple of years later his *al-Khitab al-ʿArabi al-Muʿasir* came out. The positive reception of these works set Jābirī to usher in the writing of his three-volume magnum opus entitled *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (Critique of Arab Reason), published by Dar al-Taliʿah in 1984, 1986, and 1990. After 1990, Jābirī would be the most-read writer in contemporary Arab thought. However, Jābirī would not have been able to steer the Center singlehandedly without the precarious developments in Lebanon in those years. It's no accident that the establishment of the Center

[183] Muḥammad ʿĀbid Jābirī and Aziz Abbassi, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique*, Middle East Monograph Series, no. 12 (Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University ofTexas at Austin, 1999).
[184] Most of North African leading intellectuals wrote only in French before the 1980s and their works rendered into Arabic only after decades of their publications. See the works of Arkoun, Laroui, Ben Nabi, and Al-Khattibi.

and the rise of Jābirī coincided with the beginning of the Civil War in Lebanon, the traditional seat of Arab intellectual debates.

The Lebanese Civil War

In the summer of 1984 the raging war in Lebanon took a dangerous turn, forcing many intellectuals to flee the Arab world for the first time in their lives. No one had anticipated the Lebanese civil war to endure so long. The war almost reached a conclusion early on in May 1976, one year after its outbreak in April 1975, when the allied Palestinian-Leftist party gained the upper-hand against 'conservative' Christian parties. But that outcome went against the invested interest of regional powers, especially Syria, setting the stage for the fighting to resume.[185] Foreign countries attempted to mediate a ceasefire to no avail. After the Arab league failed to contain the fighting parties in an initiative in late 1976, the meddling of both the U.S. and France proved no more fruitful. The resignation of foreign countries left Lebanon all alone to face its predicament. The so-called open window of the Middle East slammed shut. Exhausted but determined, sectarians- Christians, Sunnis, Shiʿis, Druze, and Palestinians- proved impervious to international pressure. The unravelling of the state seemed all but inevitable as violence spun out of control.

In 1984, eight years into the war, Lebanon had yet to descend deeper into medieval-style massacres. Beirut, the crown of Arab cities, the 'Paris of the east' and the long-time commercial and educational nexus of Arabs, Jews, Armenians, Turks, and Iranians,[186] was practically carved up into "private fiefdoms."[187] The mounting violence dared many ordinary Lebanese to risk their families' lives as they set to cross the 138 miles that separated Beirut from Cyprus, the closest island off Lebanon's shores. When the civil war finally came to an end in 1989, with an estimated 120,000 fatalities, it left open, festering wounds.[188]

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185 "Fearing that such an outcome would prompt an Israeli intervention, Syria's president Assad won tacit US approval to send his troops across the border to prevent a Christian defeat." See in Kamāl Dīb, *Tārīkh Lubnān Al-Thaqāfī: Min ʿaṣr Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Qarn Al-ḥādī Wa-Al-ʿishshrīn* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Sharqīyah, 2016).

186 H.E. Chehabi, '"The Paris of the Middle East": Iranians in Cosmopolitan Beirut', in H.E. Chehabi (ed.) *Iran in the Middle East: Transnational Encounters and Social History* (I. B. Tauris, 2015), 120.

187 Thomas L. Friedman. *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, 1st ed (New York, N.Y: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989), 49–76.

188 Some estimations went as high as 150,000. See R. Stephen Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubledage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 75–76.

Lebanon has shown little signs of resilience from that war. Beirut has never fully recovered. A fifteen-year period of pillaging, looting, and mutual killing, took a toll on pluralist Lebanon that eventually led the country to surrender to sectarianism. The war shattered the hope for a better future that this small country stood for, wreaking havoc on the fragile business and intellectual class that set it apart in the region. Economically, the war dissuaded wealthy, oil-producing Gulf states to continue bankrolling the national infrastructure projects already underway. The ending of the financial investment sent shivering waves into Lebanon's shaky banking system, erasing Lebanon's economic edge. As the war unfolded many journalists, academics, and scholars fled, further diminishing the already-reduced middle class. Lebanon offered an example of the high intellectual price the modern Arab world had to pay.

The assassination of Malcolm Kerr, the president of the American University of Beirut, was particularly ominous. Kerr, Beirut-born American citizen, was a compassionate writer and a true sympathizer of the Arab world. One year before his assassination in 1984, as Israel overran Lebanon, the Syrian regime silently quelled the Islamic opposition in Hama, and the entire region stood on the verge of falling apart, he wrote, "For the time being, we must remain isolated from the conflicts of the country and the region. We can survive if we persuade everyone that A.U.B. is purely and simply a professional institution of good educational quality. Naturally, we sympathize with all the people of Lebanon and the Middle East on a human level, but we are not involved in any of their factional conflicts."[189] Kerr's attempt to insulate his institution were not successful. The war engulfed every corner of Lebanon and all Kerr's talk to fend off and inoculate higher education proved premature. Kerr seems to have ignored his own insight, as expressed in the first page of his milestone *The Arab Cold War* in 1965, when he wrote "Arab politics have ceased to be fun."[190]

The grinding war in Lebanon not only eliminated Kerr but also unleashed a process that by its end undid Beirut's role as the intellectual beating heart of the Arab world. Describing the scene, one Arab commentator wrote: "It was a generation ago, in the mid-1980s, that a whole world slipped through the

[189] Eric Pace, "Malcolm Kerr, Expert on the Arabs," *New York Times*, January 19, 1984.
[190] Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958-1964; a Study of Ideology in Politics*, Chatham House Essays 10 (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

fingers of the Arab elite, formed on the secular ideals of nationalism and modernity. A city that had been their collective cultural home-Beirut-was lost to them. A political culture of nationalism that had nurtured them had led to a blind alley, and had been turned into a cover for despotism, a plaything of dictators. A theocratic temptation blew into the political world like a ferocious wind, and the secular Arabs were left thrashing about. Nothing today, no ship of sorrow can take these men and women of the secular tradition back to the verities of their world. A political inheritance has been lost."[191] The war precipitated the dispersal of Lebanon's intellectuals, far beyond Cyprus.[192] Distraught by the escalation of mutual sectarian manslaughter, especially the violence that breached the taboo on killing intellectuals, many of these scholars were looking for ways out of the beleaguered city.

The destruction of Beirut increased the appeal of other stable regions (Tunisia and Morocco) to thrive intellectually. When Beirut unraveled an entire class of intellectuals dispersed with it. On the margins of the Arab world, scholars like Jābirī in Morocco emerged as the new challengers of the tradition represented by Beirut. Indeed, the eclipse of Beirut demonstrates how the project of Arab modernity veered off course. The very foundations that supported Beirut and its intellectual tradition were erased and a more vigorous tradition was on the rise to replace it. This center would be Morocco, where Jābirī ushered in and fashioned the Turāth.

Among those who dared their lives and fled war torn Beirut was the Syrian writer and translator, Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. Ṭarābīshī was the ultimate opposite of Jābirī in every respect. He advocated for more engagement with the West and denounced Arab scholars' engagement with the Turāth. Growing up in the Levant, Ṭarābīshī was not a regular reader of western philosophy, but a "gallant defender" [193] and purveyor of Western epistemology over the last four decades. For Ṭarābīshī, embracing the Turāth meant further

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[191] Fouad Ajami, "The Arab Inheritance," Foreign Affairs, January 28, 2009, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/1997-09-01/arab-inheritance.

[192] Lebanon had to yet again restore its established tradition of immigration since the mid-nineteenth century when its first civil war in the 1860s between Christians and Druze set off intermittant communal feuds. But the civil war that started in Spring 1975 presented many Lebanese with existential threats, increasing the urge to leave the country altogether. In 2014, Lebanon was ranked the highest migration population in the world; close to 84 out of every 1000 citizens would flee the country. See World Factbook- Lebanon: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print/country/countrypdf_le.pdf

[193] Rasheed El-Enany, "Tawfīq Al-Hakīm and the West: A New Assessment of the Relationship," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 2 (November 1, 2000): 165–75.

burying Beirut under the debris of once-living and secular rule. Ṭarābīshī, now exiled in Paris, had to push back against all these powerful forces that insisted on the return to the Turāth, defending a tradition that seemed all but long gone. The configuration of these four factors made the restoration of the Turāth inevitable. But for those intellectuals displaced from the Levant, the coming of the Turāth marked an unmasked ominous sign.

Conclusion

Ever since the beginning of the twentieth-century, the Turāth had come to be recognized as the source of a lost Arab authenticity. During this time period, the Turāth transitioned from an almost unthinkable entity to a thinkable object in Arab intellectual debates. As this chapter demonestrates the evolution of the Turāth into the central framework of contemporary Arab thought captures the shifts in modes of Arab intellectual production in the post-colonial era. While the first chapter covered the debates in the wake of the Turāth discourse, this chapter aimed to empirically reconstruct the ways in which the Turāth gained more ground in the republic of Arab letters. Beginning with the massive archival works that Badawī represented in Egypt, the advent of the Center for Arab Unity that increasingly sought Arab authenticity, the coming of age of intellectuals like Jābirī from the margins, and finally the eclipse of Beirut, the city that safeguarded and checked the slide backwards toward the Turāth. The combination of all these factors reshaped the intellectual sensibility in the Arab world, sensibility that drew much of its references from the Turāth.

The Turāth should not only be understood as a limited conversation within the intellectual sphere but should also be seen as a discourse that reshaped daily practices. What cultural references were facilitated in the wake of the Turāth? What sort of self did this discourse on the Turāth fashion? The following chapters offer to answer these questions by examining the manner in which the discourse on the Turāth redesigned intellectual and ordinary conversations in the Arabic-speaking region. The next chapter examines Ṭarābīshī's criticism of the ways in which various intellectuals appropriated the Turāth. Ṭarābīshī's writings on the Turāth led him to unexpected reasoning, opening new and unforeseen horizons of thinking. It was precisely through his scrutiny of "Arab intelligentsia's infatuation with the Turāth," for instance, that his secularism came forth and took shape. As a former member of the vanquished Leftist

group, Ṭarābīshī possessed a special epistemic authority to comment on such subjects. His warning calls and caveats attest to a breed of Third World intellectuals who wholeheartedly adhered to the politics of the 1960s, politics that sought personal fulfilment and tended to dismiss the ideologies and traditions of their parents' generation. These politics, as we will see next, included a fashioning of universal ideals, radicalism, a belief in human rights, and a deep suspicion and aversion to religion, faith and the past.

CHAPTER III: THE MAKING OF A SECULAR CRITIC: JŪRJ ṬARĀBĪSHĪ

At daybreak on June 5, 1967, Israel delivered a stunning preemptive strike in what marked the beginning of the six-day war. Within hours, the Israeli air assault devastated more than eighty percent of the Egyptian air force.[194] Fighting on three separate fronts against a tripartite Arab military coalition, Israel would dictate the terms of a cease-fire ending a war that lasted only six days. The key to Israel's success was a new military strategy that stressed speed, force, and surprise; Israel ripped through its adversary's defenses by closely coordinating air power and mechanized ground forces. The war left millions of Arabs with a grim sense of shock and disbelief in their defeat. How could a tiny nation score one of history's most stunning military victories with such lightning speed? The question seared the minds of Arab elites and intellectuals. The mere thought of a meagre number of 3 million Israelis overwhelming a 100 million strong nation of Arabs sent a chilling message across the world. Arab intellectuals could not help but raise questions concerning the very core principles holding their societies together. Their introspection brought under scrutiny the corrupt hierarchical political structures beginning with the highest echelons down to family unit. Individual subjectivity received no less critical attention.[195]

From the wreck of the war arose many responses. One curious yet elusive response cohered around *Dār al-Ṭalīʿah* publishing-house in Beirut, where a small clique of young leftist Arabs came together. Their reaction was curious as it originated from a relatively small group, whose interpretations of the war gained predominance across the spectrum in the Arab society. Its members were quick to leverage the historical experience of a post-war national ethos to confer import on the war. Not only did they assigned meaning of the war, but in more important ways, they transferred the meaning of defeat from the military field to the cultural domain, turning the idea of *colossal cultural failure* (fashal ḥaḍḍāri shāmil*)* into their

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[194] Jeremy Bowen. *Six days: how the 1967 war shaped the Middle East*. London; New York Simon & Schuster, 2013. See also Nasser's speech to the Egyptian Parliament on November 23, 1967. "The road was open to Israeli forces." The entire speech (three hours) is available online: see https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=خطاب+جمال+عبد+الناصر+22+نوفمبر+1967

[195] For English works that discuss these issues see: Abu-Rabiʿ, *Contemporary Arab Thought*. Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*, SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

symbol.[196] The response they formulated was also elusive as the bulk of contemporary scholarship shifted its focus to the Islamic parties' reaction to the crushing defeat. This is while very few articles and books looked into the circle that formed around *Bashir al-Daʿuk*, the founder and owner of *Dār al-Ṭalīʿah*.[197] Already active since 1959, this group consisted of previous members (dissenters and splitters) of the *Baʿth* party in Syria. Its evolution was made more visible in 1965 with the formation of *The Arab Revolutionary Workers Party*. One of its members, a 25-year-old translator, stood out for his profound insight and commentary on what accounted for the defeat.

A young Syrian writer, Jūrj Ṭarābīshī (1939-2016) stepped into Arab politics in midcentury during his undergraduate studies at Damascus University. At the age of 18, he was recruited to the *Baʿth* party. As a dedicated member of the *Baʿth* he avidly read the writings of Zakkī al-ʾArsūzī, Michael ʿAflaq and Ṣalāḥ al-Bītār, the three founding fathers of the *Baʿth* in Syria. In the late 1960s, Ṭarābīshī emerged as a central voice and increasingly an important figure in the nascent Arab intellectual landscape in Syria and Lebanon. Although he began his political involvement as an activist within the revolutionary *Baʿth* party, Ṭarābīshī had to quit politics early on in his career to make ends meet. His advocacy for the core principles of the *Ba'th*, however, endured long after he turned his back on the party with contempt in December 1965.

Ṭarābīshī climbed his way up not through politics or the army, like many of his generation did. Instead he forged a career through translation, which brought him much success. Yet he shared a deep sense of frustration at Arab armies who failed to repulse Israeli forces, a stain that marked Arab intellectuals' tribulation the way WWII's atrocities afflicted post-war French intellectuals with moral dilemmas. It bears recalling that while during WWI, France held out against the German forces for four years, during WWII, French resistance lasted only two weeks. Ṭarābīshī who was highly attuned to French philosophical debates thought of the Arab defeat in 1967 as a scourge in a similar manner his French philosophers thought of France surrender during the war. He translated Jean Paul Sarter, Simon de

[196] One of the main voices to propagate this agenda was Syrian Marxist Yāssīn al-Hāfiẓ. See Ḥāfiẓ. Al-*Hazīmah Wa-Al-īdyūlūjiyā Al-Mahzūmah*. Beirut, Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1977.

[197] An early work that was innovative in its discussion of this group written in Hebrew: see Yehoshafat Harkabi, *ʿEmdat Ha-ʿAravim Be-Sikhsukh Yiśra'el-ʿArav* (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1968).

Buovour, and Albert Camus into Arabic during the 1960s when he was still in his twenties. His remarkable rendition of Emile Brehier's seven volumes of the *history of philosophy*, Karl Marx and Hegel, Roger Garaudy and Herbert Marcuse in the 1970s, and not the least his translation of 21 of Sigmund Freud's 43 works. These translations, no doubt, led to a surge in interest in modern philosophy and psychology in the Arab world. Throughout the entire Arab world, students from as far east as Saudi Arabia all the way to Morocco continue to rely on Ṭarābīshī's translations in the fields of critical theory, philosophy, psychology, and social theory.

Ṭarābīshī, however, was not only a translator. In 1964, at the age of 24, he published his first collections of articles on Sartre's critique of Marxism in a volume entitled *Sārter wal-Mārkissiya,*[198]*(*Sartre and Marxism) an early display of his initial protest against contemporary Arab intelligentsia, which would rise to climax in his *The Crisis of Arab Intellectuals*.[199] Before long, he turned to literary criticism during the 1970s, writing copiously on Arab feminism, and applying psychoanalyses on Arabic novel for the first time in the history of Arabic literature.[200] Even critical writers of Ṭarābīshī concede that his "psychoanalytic approach is one of the more sophisticated critiques within these [Arab] debates."[201] It is in this period of his intellectual evolution that he famously stated "the attitude towards women determines the attitude towards the world."[202] Although he remained a staunch advocate of women's rights, starting in the 1980s Ṭarābīshī's interest shifted to the examination of the Arab past, its heritage and tradition. In one word, he zeroed in on the *Turāth*.

In what follows I examine the ideological chapter in Ṭarābīshī's life before he turned to the study of the Turāth as soon as he migrated to France in 1984. What were the main ideological frameworks that he undertook in those years? What political commitments did these ideologies enable

198 Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. *Sārtar Wa-Al-Mārksīyah*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1964).
199 George Tarabishi, *al-Muthaqqafun al-ʿarab wa-l-* Ṭurāth*: al-tahlil al-nafsi li-ʿusab jamaʿi* (London: Riyad el-Rayyes li-l-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 1991)
200 Ṭarābīshī, *Sharq Wa-Gharb*; Ṭarābīshī, *Al-Rujūlah Wa-Aydiyūlūjiyā Al-Rujūlah Fī Al-Riwāyah Al-ʿArabīyah*; Ṭarābīshī and Saʿdāwī, *Woman against Her Sex*; Ṭarābīshī, *Al-Adab Min Al-Dākhil*.
201 Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 20. Massad flatly accuses Ṭarābīshī's analysis of being "implicated in an evolutionary narrative," and "colonial evolutionary schema."
202 Bayyuhum, *Al-Marʾah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*. Beirut, Dar al- Ṭalīʿah, 1980. See the long introduction by Tarabishi.

and sustain? How did these ideologies frame his attitude toward women, Turāth, and Arab culture and politics? This ideological chapter of Ṭarābīshī's life remains very critical for the formation of his ideas, presuppositions, commitments and sensibilities before he transitions, like hundreds of other Arab intellectuals, to engage the study Turāth.

Ṭarābīshī became a notable cultural critic when his critique of Arab regimes slowly gave way to commenting on its culture and the lack of secularism therein. In 1998, he justified this transition in an interview to *Al-ʿArabī* newspaper when he invoked the cultural constraints that Arab civil society imposes on free thinking. Proposing that the real threat to the burgeoning Arab democracy and freedom comes from civil society rather than political regimes, Ṭarābīshī opined "*I think that there are pressures not only from the [political] authorities, but also from civil society institutions. This is petrifying since throughout the history of cultural evolution pressure came from above. [Arab] civil society, its institutions and public, turn today to a suppressing authority. Therefore, I believe dark days are ahead of us*."[203] That Arab civil society, rather than Arab regimes, impedes possibilities for change became characteristic to the broad thesis Ṭarābīshī developed after his migration to Paris in 1984. In this stage, he wrote a five-volume encyclopedia, *Naqd al-Naqd*, which is deemed, according to one established literary critic, one of the three most significant Arabic encyclopedias to be written in the course of the twentieth century.[204]

Ṭarābīshī's authority and influence came to him early on in his intellectual journey. No doubt, his broad intellectual interests and remarkable erudition stood to him, but it was mainly because of the Syrian educational landscape that Ṭarābīshī made a name. Syria in midcentury had just begun forging its educated intelligentsia. Not only Syria had no national army when the French left in 1946, more urgently it lacked a solid scholarly and intellectual class. One Syrian observer at the time talked about the "Syrian preliminary library," an allegory that meant to describe the emerging educational and intellectual capacity that had just begun taking shape in the 1950s.[205] Into this intellectual void, in such an intellectually disadvantaged backdrop, Ṭarābīshī made his grand entrance.

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[203] Zakaria 'Abd al-Jawad, "Abou Zaid and Jurj Tarabishi," *AL-Arabi*, June 1, 1998, 475 edition.
[204] ʿĪd, "Naqd Naqd Al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi." The other two being of Ahmad Amin's *Fujir al-Islam* (5 volumes) and Muḥammad ʿAbed al-Jābirī's *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (4 volumes).
[205] Muṭāʿ Ṣafadī. *Ḥizb Al-Baʿth, Mā'sāt al-Mawlid, Mā'sāt al-Nihāyah*. al-Ṭabʿah al-ūlā (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1964). pp. 71.

Ṭarābīshī grew up to assume much coveted positions the small world of modern Arab letters could offer. Between 1972-1984 he was the chief editor of *Dār al-Ṭalīʿah*, undoubtedly one of the most esteemed publishing houses in the Arab world in the second half of the twentieth century. As a chief editor, Ṭarābīshī was in charge of its influential journal *Dirāsāt ʿArabiyya*, the main stage and platform that set the tone for the Arab left for years. Ṭarābīshī was forced to give up on this prestigious position due to the escalation of the Civil War in Lebanon. When he migrated to France, he served as the chief editor of the nationalist journal, French-based *al-Wiḥdah* (Unity) between 1984-1989. Working these two precious positions kept him abreast with the flourishing Arabic publication industry in the post-1967 world.

Ṭarābīshī belongs to a generation that straddled the colonial and post-colonial eras. This generation experienced both the sting of colonization and the ensuing momentary euphoria accompanying the rise of the post-colonial state. This generation, "the generation of losing wagers" as he referred to it, was defined by three events that partly explain its penchant to critique and its, one dares to say, imbedded pessimism.[206] In its teens, this generation witnessed the spectacular upsurge in nationalism and national feelings. The emergence of the post-colonial Arab states in the late 1940s boosted these feeling. The main event that validated and reinforced this euphoria was the gallant resistance Egyptian leader ʿAbed al-Nasser put up against Britain, France, and Israel in 1956. However, the ensuing crashing military defeat against Israel in 1967, confounded by the disenchantment with which they saw the miscarried union experiment with Syria in 1961 (when Nassir sent General Hafiz al-Asad to Jail). These two events not only dampened the triumphant mood, but, thirdly, gave rise to a vigorous Islamic political activity. The rise of Islam and the enforcement of Islamic morals, began to inform popular and intellectual debates since 1967. It is against this growing cultural tide that Ṭarābīshī's relentless pushback comes to fore.

Like many intellectuals of his generation, Ṭarābīshī undertook the mission of critically engaging the past to offer a new reading of the present. What set him apart, however, was his adherence to the secular and his particular 'against the grain reading of the past," as IslamOnline, one of the most widely-

[206] On the pessimistic mood among Arab intellectuals see: Samir Kassir, *Being Arab* (London: Verso, 2013).

read websites in the Arab world pointed out.[207] Ṭarābīshī was portrayed as the first Arab intellectual to go as far to "establish secularism" in Islam "as an indispensable part of the historical experience of Arab and Islamic past, not an idea that came from outside [the West]."[208] However, embracing secularism in an age of authenticity and growing Islamic morality cost him dearly. Ṭarābīshī quickly turned into the new outcast. Some has lay the blame for his tendency to self-flagellating claiming that he has contributed his part to embedding yet deeper the sense of defeatism or entrenching defeatism (Tā'ṣīl al-Hazīmah).[209]

Ṭarābīshī's uniqueness came to him not in virtue of his scathing critique of Arab intelligentsia. Criticism and self-critique marked the post-1967 age. Ever since Ṭarābīshī's generation, born in the 1930s, came of age, it was obsessed with deconstructing prevailing social axioms, undermining the status quo, assailing cultural practices, and critiquing obsolete ways of readings. This is the first generation, one historian maintained, to dispute the order of things, contesting their naturalness.[210] Ṭarābīshī's distinctiveness, however, stemmed from his "gallant defense" of the west in the Arab world.[211] In particular his unwavering advocacy of secularism and rationalism, ideas that to this day remain elusive to the vast majority of Arab intellectuals.

Ṭarābīshī had many intellectual fathers including Yāssīn al-Hāfiẓ in Damascus, Suhayl Idrīs in Lebanon, Mohammad Arkoun in Paris. The final "murdering of the fathers", a concept Ṭarābīshī knew well through his translations of Freud, was central and distinct to his identity. Meanwhile his persistent adherence to secularism drove a wedge among Arab intellectuals. Ṭarābīshī welcomed this moment of separation not only because it enabled him to re-examine his previous (ideological) positions, but also because it offered him a rare opportunity to shed off all intellectual godparents and authorities above him.

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[207] "At the beginning of 2009 IslamOnline's internet traffic placed it among the top 200 sites in Yemen, Sudan, Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia." Brian Whitaker, *What's Really Wrong with the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2009), 330.

[208] Yahmid, "*Jurj Tarabishi: Al-ʿIlmaniyya Matlab Islami*." [Secularism is an Islamic Demand.]

[209] ʿAmer Hassan, "Tasīl Al-Hazima," *Al-Akhbar*, June 8, 2015, 3609 edition.

[210] Charless Issawi saw this generation as the first generation to truly break away with medieval Arab traditional society with its members believing "in the prevailing values" and accepting "existing institutions." See: Charles Philip Issawi, *The Arab World's Legacy: Essays* (Princeton, N.J: Darwin Press, 1981), 231–2.

[211] I borrow the term "gallant defense of Europe and its modern values" from El-Enany. see Rasheed El-Enany, "Tawfī¯q Al-Haki¯m and the West: A New Assessment of the Relationship," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 2 (November 1, 2000): 165–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530190020000510. P.170

"*My desire to revolt against my father was always stronger than my desire to tuck under the banner of a protective father*."[212] The current chapter and the next have no claim to offering an exhaustive account of "the most industrious and productive Arab intellectual" in the second half of the twentieth-century.[213] At the center of these chapters rest the examination of the ways Ṭarābīshī's thought evolved through three stations: In Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut. The examination of Ṭarābīshī's career in the first half of his life affords a window through which to peek on the revolutionary age in the Arab world, an age where different western ideas were the main ground upon which intellectual wars were fought (nationalism, existentialism, Marxism, Freudianism.) The eclipse of the ideological/revolutionary age in the late 1970s, however, would send Arab intellectuals searching for new frameworks in what is known now as the age of authenticity. This chapter ends with Ṭarābīshī's symbolic relocation to Paris as most of the ideologies that he spent his life defending were in a steep wane.

The Man

"What a man is, only his history can tell him," Wilhel Dilthey

The study of Ṭarābīshī's life and thought could not be divorced from the familial, social, and cultural context in which he lived and worked. Though Ṭarābīshī claimed that he had transcended his roots, changing his perspectives and worldviews frequently, his experiences in Syria and Lebanon informed his literary tastes and intellectual visions. This is because whatever happened around him plays upon his psychology and thoughts.

From modest setting to stardom in the world of Arab letters, Jūrj Ṭarābīshī trekked a long yet smooth way up. His life reflects the common story of a full-blown hope that gradually vanished from the scene after the optimism of the 1950s-60s gave way to the harsh realities of the 1970s-90s. In his writings, he embodied the rise and fall of the aspirations of a great swath of Arab intellectuals: the aspiration of independence, the ending of a humiliating chapter of colonialism and economic dependency, and the achievement of Arab Unity through the liberation of Palestine. As the decade of 1980s demonstrated none

[212] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. *Min Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Riddah: Tamazzuqāt Al-Thaqāfah Al-ʿArabīyah Fī vaṣr Al-ʿawlamah*. (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2000), 114.
[213] Khaled Ghazal, "Jurj Tarabishi and His Role in Arab Enlightenment (1)," Alawan.org, April 12, 2014, http://www.alawan.org/article13069.html.

of these core issues around which Arab intellectuals set themselves to achieve was closer to attainment. Quite the contrary, Egypt was collectively conceived as a country that compromised its sacred commitment to Arab Unity and made a unitary peace with Israel, even when Israel invaded Beirut (first Arab capital) in 1982. Palestine was no closer to achieve its national aspiration of statehood. Colonialism morphed into marginalizing the Arab world against Europe, perpetuating a lopsidedness in the northern and southern rims of the Mediterranean. In what follows, I offer an intellectual biography of one of these disenchanted intellectuals in three stages: Aleppo, Damascus and Beirut.

The Beginning: ***Aleppo***

The northern Syrian city of Aleppo featured a degree of modern facilities such as electricity and running water when Jūrj Ṭarābīshī was born on 5 April 1939, six years in advance of Syria's independence in April 1946. For years Aleppo was "one of the most important cities" which "sat astride global trade routes and served in the early modern period as a center of long-distance commerce in luxury goods, attracting merchants from all around the Mediterranean, north Europe, and South and Central Asia."[214] An exceedingly multicultural city, Aleppo fashion diverse groups of not only of Arab Christians but also Jewish traders like the Sassoon family, Venetians merchant and adventurers and the Armenian silk merchants and even weavers marking the city "with a tremendous ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity."[215] Being the first Arab city to welcome travelers from the Turkish logo-sphere to the Arabic-speaking world, Aleppo had been functioning as a trade center between the Hejaz and Istanbul for generations. Yet, it was during the much-hated French mandate (1920-1946) that its infrastructure developed rapidly, triggering a drastic shift in the status and the well-being of the durable class of landowners.

When the French took control of Syria after WWI, they received a city that was immensely effected by nineteenth century Reforms, including the tearing down of the city walls. After quashing the initial revolute that sparked in full force between 1925-27, French authorities began building wide thoroughfares,

[214] Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006), 32–33.
[215] Watenpaugh, 32–33.

ramping up the city's industrial factories, opening new schools for its sizable Christian community, and connecting it to European centers. Aleppo's noticeable economic expansion witnessed between the two wars, would bear fruits and become more tangible only a decade after the mandate ended. After Syria's independence, Aleppo would retain this progressive trend, along with Damascus, that set these cities in directions that departs from the vastly agricultural industry that dominated in the rest of Syria. The home of the only air force flying school in Syria, Aleppo further increased in significance as the army began to play a consequential role in directing Syrian politics. British journalist, Patrick Seale, who gained unfettered access to Syrian state archives and befriended Syrian leadership and Asad himself, gave an informative description of the Syrian socioeconomic landscape shortly after the French mandate was swept away in 1946:

"Syria was a predominantly agricultural country, its backbone being two million peasants out of a then population of about 3.5 million, inhabiting some 5,500 villages built of mud and mostly lacking piped water, sewerage, electricity, tarred roads or any other amenity of modern life. Because of overcrowding and poor sanitation the population was ravaged by disease… In 1951-3, 36 per cent of registered deaths occurred among children under five…Outside the two main cities of Damascus and Aleppo electricity was rare, serving fewer than a three-quarters of a million people in the whole country."*216*

Raised in Aleppo into a middle-class Christian family, Ṭarābīshī was poised to pick a career in trade or education but not in the army. Middle class families in Syria looked down at army service, condescendingly deeming it a low status job track reserved for people from rural areas. The divide between country and urban sensibilities was seen as clearly depicted as the split between the savage and the civilized. Seale and others[217] have considered city dwellers' attitude towards the army a "historical mistake": *"*scorning the army as a profession, they allowed it to be captured by their class enemies who then went on to capture the state itself*."*[218] As a city dweller, Ṭarābīshī naturally shied away from the army. When the government called for volunteers in the early years of its independence, it was not

[216] Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1988), 44.
[217] Bowen, *Six Days*, 14–15.
[218] Seale and McConville, *Asad of Syria*, 39.

urbanites who responded, but masses of "country boys." Alawites, for long despised and deride, were among the first to embrace this opportunity. "The army was an attractive alternative [for country boys] because…fees had abolished at the Military Academy at Homs which thus became the only institution to offer poor boys a start in life: the cadets were lodged, fed and even paid to be there."219 The Syrian army, since its inception, became a welcoming institution for minorities, while being shunned by middle class urbanites. Ṭarābīshī grew up with a grudge against the army, which he referred to with contempt as qūwāt al-ʿaskar al-mutarayyif or "ruralized military force."[220]

Although Aleppo sported a bustling urban space, it nevertheless offered only an array of religious schools, with the exception of European schools. Ṭarābīshī attended a Christian school that instilled a sense of religious attachment in him. He spent his youth in Aleppo, where switching between a religious school and a practicing Christian household molded his early moralities and ethical inclinations. "*I was born to a Christian family and in the first stage of my childhood I was excessively religious to the extent that invoked the irony of my younger brother*."[221] The oldest child of eight siblings, he took the name of his grandfather George (Jūrj) to observe a customary practice, which still endures in many Arabic-speaking societies. Later in his life, Ṭarābīshī would lament his name. In "*Because of my Name*", an article he wrote a couple of years before he passed away, Ṭarābīshī lamented carrying the name Jūrj for its reference and connotation to Christianity. "*Because of my name I failed to become an Arab hero*."[222] Among his siblings, who were all male, he was the only one to take a name that had a pure "sectarian and Christian ring" to it.[223] This demurring about his Christian name reflects a deeper concern that preoccupied Ṭarābīshī in real life. He was a man who belonged to a Christian minority, which deemed itself different, Western sponsored, and by definition sectarian, and thus isolated from the rest of Syrian Sunni majority. At the same time, Ṭarābīshī claimed to embody Arab nationalism and advocated for Arab unity and

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219 Ibid. 38.
220 Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Min Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Riddah: Tamazzuqāt Al-Thaqāfah Al-ʿArabīyah Fī ʿaṣr Al-ʿawlamah*. (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2000), 122.
221 Tarabishi, "Sitat Maḥatāt Fi Ḥayātti" (Six Stations in My Life)." 23 Feb 2015. *Al-Awan*
222 Jurj Tarabishi, "*Bisabab Ismi Fashiltu Ann Akun Munadilan ʿArabiyyan*," accessed July 8, 2015, https://samisalah.wordpress.com/2012/03/16. [Because of my name I failed to be recognized an Arab hero]
223 Jurj Tarabishi. Ibid.

nationalism. The discrimination against Arab Christians may have niggled at his conscious but he never let that feeling overwhelm him. The paradox did not pass unnoticed by the overwhelming majority. Yet, the notion of *al-Makhraj al-ʿalmani* "The Secular Resolution" or the "Secular Exist" was a personal and intellectual battle to break through this paralyzing paradox as we will see next.

EARLY SCHOOLING:

"In the 1940s there was only one secondary school along the whole length of the coast, from the northern frontier of Lebanon to Alexandretta, serving Latakia, Tartus, Jableh, and the entire mountain hinterland."[224] Ever since its independence in 1946 until 1970 when Hafiz al-Assad wrested power, the Syrian government failed to gain popular legitimacy and stabilize its political system. The country's educational system was in tatters. Three years into its independence Syria had descended into a political quagmire that stymied its efforts to put together a viable educational system. Three forces locked into a fierce rivalry over seizure of power: the old landowners who struggled for survival, the rising army officers, and the newly formed educated bourgeoisie who defined themselves against the wanton communists.[225] The army was a new establishment that more than once had allied with the educated bourgeoisie to dislodge the notorious landowners and wealthy families from power. The first destabilizing year came in 1949 when Syria was rocked by three coups d'états in one year. The first was led by Hussny al-Zāʿīm who ousted Shukry al-Qawatly (1891-1967), wreaking havoc on a fragile and still vulnerable state. This was the first illegal usurpation of power in post-colonial Syria by a military officer, which heralded a series of military putsches to follow in the Arab world. Al- Zāʿīm (1897-1949) represented the rising clout of the young generation which challenged Qawatly the guardian of the deeply entrenched interests of the big families and landowners.[226] In so doing al-Zāʿīm set in motion unprecedented *Inqilab* that would repeat and recreate itself in different forms in neighboring Arab states. Like other coups in the Middle East, it reflected the scramble for power between the haves and have-nots, the old generation against the emerging and radicalized generation. In Syria, al-Zāʿīm was initially propped up by young

[224] Seale and McConville, *Asad of Syria*, 12.
[225] Ṣafadī. *Ḥizb Al-Baʿth, Ma'sāt Al-Mawlid, Ma'sāt Al-Nihāyah*, 57.
[226] "By the mid-twentieth-century, 1 percent of the population of Syria owned about 50 percent of the land." Cited by James Galvin. *The Modern Middle East*. Third Edition. Oxford University Press, 2011. P. 243.

Baʿthists, who hitherto had only fuzzy ideas about the ideology they promoted. Al-Zāʿīm, however, would not last more than few months in power as he lost his head at the hands of his angered *Baʿthist* allies. He was muscled out of power in a coup conducted by Sāmi al-Ḥinnāwi (1898-1950), a politician who also came from the officer ranks. Ḥinnāwi's fate was no less tragic than his predecessor's. He failed to meet the expectations of the diverse and conflicting groups of the old bourgeoisie, the military, and the educated classes which pulled away the political establishment in different directions. He was overthrown in yet another coup, this time engineered by Ādīb al-Shīshiklī, a Kurd from Hama. In the course of the first two decades after its independence, Syria would see a record number of 18 presidents.[227] It was only with the arrival of Ḥafiẓ al-Asad that the scramble for power in Syria saw a cruel end.

While Syria's political scene was infamously unpredictable, the educational system fared no better. In 1943-1944 "*less than a quarter of all Syrian children between the ages of six and twelve attended school.*"[228] In one village of Qurdahā in the northwest of Syria, the village where Asad was born, "a man would have to go round the whole neighborhood to find someone able to read a letter. The few people who could read were respected."[229] Syria had no unified curriculum either and suffered from a paucity of qualified and competent teachers. This gave an edge to a host of religious schools and ulama who held a larger sway over education. Unlike Lebanon, Syria had no more than one university- the University of Damascus established in 1923. Aleppo, the second largest city in Syria, had no institution of higher education until 1957, the year in which the University of Aleppo was inaugurated. A high school diploma (baccalaureate) was the highest degree awarded in Syrian colleges and it did endow some respectability and social status to its holders.[230] Ṭarābīshī opened his eyes to the world precisely when this tumultuous political landscape and educational chaos raged on.

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[227] Bowen, *Six Days*, 13–15.

[228] Seale and McConville, *Asad of Syria*, 7.

[229] Seale and McConville, 14.

[230]Syrian writer and ex-Ba'athist Muta' Safadi conveys a bleak picture of the educational system in Syria after independence. He argues that very few intellectuals were in Syria at the mid century. Most of the founding father of the Ba'ath Party, he claims, were no more than high school teachers. see Ṣafadī, *Ḥizb Al-Baʿth, Maʾsāt Al-Mawlid, Maʾsāt Al-Nihāyah*. P. 79-87. Seale mentions that "in Zabadani, west of Damascus, only eight boys were admitted to secondary school in 1941 out of a population of some 40,000." (P.25) In a footnote he continues "In 1946 there were only 8000 places in Syrian secondary schools; by 1953 this had risen to 50,000." P. 479 footnote #2

In the Christian schools a sort of identity was taking shape. Teachers were zealous to foster Christian identity in their pupils by emphasizing Christian morality and spiritual conceptions while watering down prevalent national feeling. The nationalist wave seemed to threaten the very bond that held Arab Christians together for centuries. It was in such a school that young Ṭarābīshī became aware to his Christian identity. One morning in a theology class stood a teacher who was also a priest in the Church of Aleppo, to teach a class on "sin" and the fate of those who meet their "death in sin". The teacher/priest faced fourteen-year-old students who all came from Christian families. He began describing the "eternal punishments" God inflicts on people who commit "unpardonable sin." To simplify the meaning of "perpetual punishment" the teacher asked his students to imagine a bird that touches the earth with its wings once in a millennium. He followed with a rhetorical question "how many millenniums would it take the bird to eliminate the earth?" The punchline was if you die in sin, you will be punished "eternally."

This little drama meant to shore up the fading Christian elements in students' identity in an age of ascending national feeling that seemed at the time to render religious identity almost obsolete. The teacher wanted his students to acquiesce to God's ordains, but his fear-provoking stories backfired. Hearing these dreadful descriptions of hell and God's merciless punishment, Ṭarābīshī reportedly "trembled with fear" (*aṣābatni ra'dah*). "The fear of eternal punishment is a cruel thing to instill in a child" he writes. He then "exited school's gates with his head down." He could not afford lifting his head up to see his beloved Italian girl on her balcony as he made his way back "fearing that the mere desire to watch her could be a reason for unpardonable sin."[231]

Feeling that religion made impossible demands, Ṭarābīshī recorded this episode as one of the first distressing events that undermined his belief in God. "I reached home with semi-derelict reactions and became sick for two days. When I woke up my only reaction was no… it is impossible that the God the teacher talked about exists and is cruel to this extent. Ever since that day I turned away from Christianity"[232] (*kafaftu ān ākunu masīḥiyyan*). Ṭarābīshī's break with Christianity came as a spontaneous reaction to psychological stress and anxiety. It is hard to verify the accuracy of this story- but given that

[231] Tarabishi, "Six Stations in My Life (sitat Mahatat Fi Hayyati)."
[232] Tarabishi.

other students in this generation experienced similar feeling it is not a far-fledged story. Ṭarābīshī disavowed religion at very young age but he invoked (or rather recreated) this experience later in his life when he found the ideas of French philosopher Marcel Gauchet palatable to his literary taste. A mere three years before his death, Ṭarābīshī argued that Gauchet was one of his favorite philosophers because his ideas resonated with his own experience in Syria. Gauchet, one should recall, maintains that Christianity is a unique religion in the sense that it provides the necessary conditions for the rise of secularism. Christianity, Gauchet writes, "proves to have been a religion for departing from religion."[233] Gauchet was only partially true in this observation since as Ṭarābīshī will prove in his later works, Islam also carries concealed "seeds of secularism" not unlike those of Christianity. Ṭarābīshī's description of his departure journey from religion may have begun within the parameters of Christianity but it would not reach completion before his (traumatic) encounter with Islam.

In 1954, three years after the agony that the religious teacher inflicted on him, Ṭarābīshī mentioned a "second incident" that left him disenchanted with religion. This was to happen in the newly introduced Islamic studies during his high school years. "Islamic classes were a new thing to the Syrian curriculum" writes Ṭarābīshī. "Islamic studies became mandatory only after the coup that took place in 1955 that toppled Shīskiklī."[234] Shīshiklī's authoritarian rule was so intense and reprehensible that it drove otherwise antagonistic parties, including Communists, Baʿthists, and the Muslim Brotherhood to collaborate to bring him down. Indeed, it was under this totalitarian regime that the Baʿth saw its ranks swelling with the merge of Akram Hourani and other factions within the Baʿth. These parties joined forces and colluded to put an end to the draconian regime of Shīshiklī.[235] The morning after Shīshiklī was forced out, Ṭarābīshī writes, the "Muslim Brotherhood refused to take any [political] part in the newly formed government" stipulating one caveat that changed the educational scene in Syria for years to come: For not partaking in the new

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[233] Marcel Gauchet and Charles Taylor, *The Disenchantment of the World*, trans. Oscar Burge, 0002- edition (Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

[234] Tarabishi writes 1955 but he meant the coup that took place in February 24-25, 1954 when Shishikli forced out of office because of the looming threats of immanent coup. He fled the country to Brazil, where he was assassinated by a Druze fellow Nawāf Ghazāleh, to revenge the killing of his family. Hānī Khayyir, *Adīb Al-Shīshaklī: ṣāḥib Al-Inqilāb Al-Thālith Fī Sūriyā, Al-Bidāya ... Wa-Al-Nihāya*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Damascus: H. al-Khayyir, 1994).

[235] Ibid.

government offices they demanded to have Islamic studies introduced to high school and academic curricula. "Until 1955"[236], writes Ṭarābīshī, "only primary and secondary schools taught religious studies." Starting in the post-Shīshiklī era, "Religious studies became mandatory for all [Syrian] students." Before that coup, "we used to learn national and moral studies" that now "turned to religious studies."[237]

Incorporating "religious studies" left Ṭarābīshī alarmed and petrified. For Ṭarābīshī it marked the beginning of the unravelling of Syria's secular curriculum that had always been taken for granted. "I deliberately decided to take a class in Islamic, rather than Christian, studies to learn about the majority that I live within," writes Ṭarābīshī on the experience that led him to depart religion entirely. During one Islamic class stood a serene teacher, round faced, with a shortly trimmed beard, and wrote slowly on the board, "Who he is not Muslim is an enemy of Islam." Appalled and frightened, Ṭarābīshī stood out to his teacher identifying himself as Jurj and followed with a question "Would you consider me your enemy?" Ṭarābīshī never mentioned the name of the teacher, whom he would meet years later and recall the incident together. This disconcerting episode hacked Ṭarābīshī's religiosity as he began to realize that an unbridgeable gulf began separating him from religion. Though he did not turn to secularism instantly, he understood that religion drives a wedge among the different sects and diverse minorities in Syria. Some of the Christian students, notices another Syrian scholar, left religious classes entirely while Muslim students attended, increasing the tensions between them.[238] Ṭarābīshī carried these sentiments, fraught with distressing memories, with him all the way to Damascus to attend university.

Political Predicament: In Damascus

Ṭarābīshī's dreadful experiences may not have registered in his memory for so long without the cultural and political temperament of Damascus. He moved to Damascus to pursue his studies at the

[236] Writing from memory, Tarabishi had a tendency to misplace dates and events. Damascus University created a Faculty of Shariʿa in 1954 in the wake of the coup in which Mutafa al-Sibaʿi was appointed its first dean, a position he held while remaining secretary-general of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.
[237] Tarabishi, "Six Stations in My Life (sitat Mahatat Fi Hayyati)."
[238] See the biography of al-Rayyis, one of Ṭarābīshī's contemporaries. Riyāḍ Najīb Rayyis. *Ākhir Al-Khawārij: Ashyā' Min Sīrah ṣiḥāfīyah*. al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 2004).

department of Arabic studies at Damascus University.[239] In 1955-56, the year in which he arrived to the capital, he witnessed first-hand a chaotic Damascus that reflected the fierce fighting engulfing the nation. Damascus barely seemed governable as it was yet to come to terms with the new reality of independence. As one observer succinctly noticed "Syria is a country that never wanted to exist at all, at least within its present boundaries."[240] Twenty years of French rule in Syria had pitted urbanites against rurals, landowner's elite against landless, the old and complacent against the new and radical generation. The French rule, another observer remarked, "undermined the old ways but failed to implant convincing new ones."[241] This partly accounts for the prolonged struggle to fix the broken system.

At mid-century Damascus was brimming with national (and chauvinistic) ideas and it seemed poised to effect far-reaching changes. If Aleppo instilled in Ṭarābīshī the first signs of anti-religion, then Damascus trained him on nationalist sentiments. In the decade that preceded his arrival to Damascus, the city was roiled by many new migrants who flocked the town after the amputation of Alexandretta-Antioch from Syria in 1939. This wave of dislocated migrants flared up national sentiments that had never dissipated. One of those dislocated was Zakī al-Arsūzī, whose writings would vastly influence young Ṭarābīshī.

In Damascus, as in Aleppo, the same patterns were at work but with higher velocity and intensity. Three semi-ideological forces grappled with each other for power: Baʿthists, Pan-Arabists (Anṭūn Saʿādah's circle) and Communists (though the later party was fable in Aleppo.) All these groups were anxious about the future of Syria. All three pushed for Arab unity as a remedy to what they deemed Arab fragmentation and social ills. In the Syrian limbo of the midcentury, the Communists seemed to stand higher chances of gaining political ground particularly in the early 1950s. A number of events helped ensure the rise of the Communist power in Syria that appealed for newcomers like Ṭarābīshī. In neighboring Iraq, an opportunist politician, ʿAbed al-Karem Qāssim, seized power in a bloody coup that

[239] If between 1947-8 the number of female students at Damascus University were just 284, then the tally has quadruple by 1952 to a total of 501 out of 2404 students. See Ṭarābīshī's introduction in Bayyuhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*. Beirut. Dār al-Taliʿah. p. 33. [Women in Islam and in Western Culture]

[240] R. Stephen Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubledage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 71.

[241] Seale and McConville, *Asad of Syria*, 26.

put a definite end to the monarchy. Qāssim professed allegiance to no ideology other than his fierce opposition to Iraqi nationalists. To solidify his shaky status, Qāssim gave free rein to the communists who swarmed the Rasheed and al-Mutanabi streets to eliminate the vociferous and aggressive nationalist opposition. The Syrian communists took note of the drama unfolding in Iraq, which instilled a growing confidence in their cause. Moreover, the anticipated weapon deal with the USSR signed in 1957 with the Syrian government boosted Syrian communists, which blasted their adversaries by boasting deeds over words. Needless to say, Communism held some allure for deprived people and newcomers as it offered grand promises to demolish all social walls and differences that had stymied Syrian political progress since the nineteenth century.[242] Ṭarābīshī found it just natural to follow this party of change before he changed his mind and joined the ranks of the Baʿth. The Baʿth were looking at Gamal Abed al-Nasser in Egypt who began restructuring Egypt in radical ways. For young Baʿthist, an alignment with Nasser could block the rise of Communism in Syria. Few things can capture the political disorientation in mid-century Syria as the events in the late 1950s. In 1958 Syria politicians, unable to settle on state policy handed over their country to Nasser. Unhappy, Nasser accepted the offer with reluctance stipulating one condition: the abolishment of all Syrian parties.

The inflow of people and ideas to the capital animated Damascus. Ṭarābīshī's time in this city attests to a place that teemed with genuine ideas, innovation, and creativity. After spending a brief stint in the communist circles, Ṭarābīshī was displeased with their dogmatism and joined the *Baʿth* party. The lines separating the two parties were still vague as both parties lacked definite agendas and official programs with very few writings. Both drew from socialist and vague Marxist ideas floating around in the daily press. In one of his early books Ṭarābīshī writes "*I do not know how we became socialists. All I know is that we found ourselves believing in socialism*."[243] Indeed, Ṭarābīshī's life offers a revisionist perspective on the narrative of the *nahda* literature as a moment in which the Arab world opened up to

[242] Ṭarābīshī, *Sārtar Wa-Al-Mārksīyah*, 187.
[243] Ṭarābīshī, *Sārtar Wa-Al-Mārksīyah*. Introduction.

Western ideas,[244] embarked on publishing industry and engaged with European ideas.[245] The way Ṭarābīshī's generation was copping with Western ideas signals that though they were familiar with Western scholarship, they barely mastered them.

The experience of Ṭarābīshī in Damascus, particularly his unmitigated confusion and fluctuating between parties and ideologies, testifies that many ideologies were not completely graspable, much less legible to his generation. More importantly, the picture that emerged from Ṭarābīshī's life in Aleppo and Damascus not only impugned on the accepted narrative of the *nahda*, but also goad us to rethink the way in which post-colonial intellectuals dealt with the near absence of intellectual class, the feeble educational institutes,[246] the melt down of publishing houses and journals,[247] and most prominently the lack of cultural capacity to grapple with complicated Western ideas. In his writings, Ṭarābīshī convey this sense of lack of mastery with Western philosophies and the paucity of this Western literature in Arabic. He writes that he turned to socialism in his adulthood not due to any meticulous reading of socialist literature, but because "*the pursuit of justice is always profound and sweeping among adults. This sense of justice alone propelled us to be socialists. In short, we were rebellious but not revolutionaries*."[248]

Ṭarābīshī's relocation to Damascus made it smoother for him to exit religion. Still it was not a clean break. He devoured nationalist literature of the *Baʿth* and quickly assumed its ideology as he shook off all remnants of religion. He read Zakī al-Arsuzi who praised Arabic and Arabs in history (he will be later called the philosopher of Arabic), Michel ʿAflaq and al-Bitar, and Antūn Saʿādah the genuine Pan-Arabist who propagated the idea of Greater Syria that included Cyprus, for which he was executed in 1949. This limited literature provided him with a valid an alternative of the *religious text.* It offered Ṭarābīshī and his generation anew opportunity to participate in the building of a fledging world of

[244] Wael Abu-ʿUksa. *Freedom in the Arab World: Concepts and Ideologies in Arabic Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[245] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[246] Donald Malcolm Reid, "Cairo University and the Orientalists," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 1 (February 1, 1987): 51–75.
[247] Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership, 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[248] Ṭarābīshī, *Sārtar Wa-Al-Mārksīyah*. p. 7-8.

literature. When he arrived in Damascus, a new world broke into his life. Tey, Ṭarābīshī perceived the *Baʿth* ideologies in religious terms. Damascus freed him from religious shackles, but instead bounded him to the *Baʿth* illiberal ideology. Though Damascus was full of life, it offered a poor job market, particularly to young graduates. [249] Ṭarābīshī carried on his studies and obtained a master's degree in education in 1963. He set out to be a teacher, but in a streak of misfortune, he was sent off to teach in a small village far from Damascus. He couldn't settle to this job since he had already developed rebellious sentiments that stood in contradiction with the nature of a teaching career. Later he would claim that "I quit teaching because I was assigned to teach in a desolate and far off village away from my wife in Damascus."[250]After unsuccessfully pleading with the education minister to teach in Damascus, Ṭarābīshī decided to quit his job.

Under Hizb al-Baʿth

The First World War terminated 400 years of Ottoman dominance over Syria (1516-1918.) In the wake of the Great War the Arab provinces were left to the vagaries of the two Western superpowers of the time: Great Britain and France. In 1916, in an infamous agreement known as Sykes-Picot, which every Syrian "schoolchild learned to detest and vilify," these superpowers secretly arranged to carve up the Middle East between them. France agreed to take control of the northern part – today's Syria and Lebanon- while conceding to Britain the areas that included Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. This haphazard breaking up of the Arab lands was more than the inhabitants of Greater Syria could swallow, sowing the first seeds of illiberal parties like the nationalist Baʿth party. Before World War I, Syrians were accustomed to traveling and trading freely all the way between Antioch in the north to Palestine in the south. When the mandate regimes restricted this free movement, they anticipated the first Syrian national feeling. In response, national councils emerged in Syria for the first time. Before the advent of modern political parties, these national councils were elected in July 1919, calling themselves the Syrian National

[249] In Damascus, Tarabishi meets an outstanding student Henrate ʿAbud, who would accompany him as a wife and a translator partner. Henrate, who came from the famous ʿAbud family brought order and discipline into Tarabishi's life. Most prominently, she transformed his literary taste in favor of writing on women. She became a well-known novelist and translator of classical modernity literature. They would have three daughters together.
[250] Interview, Paris 5/22/2014.

Congress. This Congress pioneered the national movement in Syria that formed against foreign intervention. *"They demanded sovereign status for united Syria-Palestine."*[251] The French Mandate, dismissive of the Syrians' demands, responded swiftly with the deposing of king (Amir) Faysal, who had established himself as the de facto ruler of Greater Syria during the last year of the Great War 1918. Faysal's odds in ruling Syria were ill-fated from the beginning. He faced internal resistance from Homs which was dominated by Christians and other Damascene families who wanted ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jazāʾiri to rule them. To appeal to Christians in the city of Homs Faysal stated that "Al-Dīn lillah wal-Watan li-ljamīʿ,"[252] coining a phrase for the first time. Yet, his policy toward Syrians did not bode well. The most striking example being the establishment of the first school for girls in Syria. Unsatisfied with the special school that accepted only girls, some conservative Syrians took to streets and chanted *al-Qabr walā al-Madrasah* "We rather build a cemetery than a [girls] school."[253]

The *Baʿth* party came into being in Syria at the twilight of World War II (1943-1947.) It was officially formed in 1946 though its ideological kernel reaches back to the post WWI. The *Baʿth* is made of four factions, three with the name al- *Baʿth,* that was first coined by Zaki al-Arsuzi's journal al- *Baʿth 1940.* The merge of these factions took place in Damascus between the representatives of these factions: Aflaq and Bitar in Damascus, Akram al-Hourani in Homs, Jalāl al-Sayyid in Der al-Zur, Wahib al-Ghanim in Latikiya, and Anton Makdisi from Aleppo. Each one of these factions' leaders was sustained by a group of supporters.[254]

From a historical perspective, the core ideas that informed the *Baʿth* party could not have been conceived in any other Arab state but Syria. The French mandate that carved up Syria into four administrative enclaves had anticipated its emergence. France, as the acting sovereign over Syria, not only

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[251] Seale and McConville, *Asad of Syria*, 14–15.

[252] Nabīl Shuwayrī and Ṣaqr Abū Fakhr. *Sūrīyah Wa-ḥuṭām Al-Marākib Al-Mubaʿtharah: ḥiwār Maʿa Nabīl Al-Shuwayrī: ʿAflaq Wa-Al-Baʿth Wa-Al-Muʾāmarāt Wa-Al-ʿaskar*, Ḥiwārāt (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsātwa-al-Nashr, 2005), 162.

[253] Bayyuhum, *Al-Marʾah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*, 32.

[254] The best accounts in Arabic of the history of the *Baʿth* are Ṣafadī, *Ḥizb Al-Baʿth, Maʾsāt Al-Mawlid, Maʾsāt Al-Nihāyah*; Nabīl Shuwayrī and Ṣaqr Abū Fakhr, *Sūrīyah Wa-ḥuṭām Al-Marākib Al-Mubaʿtharah: ḥiwār Maʿa Nabīl Al-Shuwayrī: ʿAflaq Wa-Al-Baʿth Wa-Al-Muʿāmarāt Wa-Al-ʿaskar*, al-Ṭabʿah 1, Ḥiwārāt (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsātwa-al-Nashr, 2005).

took huge mass of Syrian land and attached them to Mount Lebanon in 1920, where its Maronite protégés held sway since 1860, it also submitted large parts of the former province of Aleppo to Turkey. Seeking to sway Turkey on its side during WWII, France officially ceded Alexandretta-Antioch to Turkey in 1939 in return for joining the War on its side. This surgical amputation of Syrian land had its two main cities (Damascus in the south, Aleppo in the north) wearing thin. It dealt a serious blow to the two major cities as they both lost direct access to the Mediterranean Sea (one was blocked by Lebanon the other by Alexandretta.) Concomitantly, as the British split up Palestine to facilitate a new "Homeland for the Jews," the dreams of Greater Syria grew ever slimmer. This subtraction of land, one Levantine intellectual noticed, stirred "*national feeling and opened Arabs eyes to the ghost that threatened to tear up and rip apart their land."*[255] Thus, it is only natural that the true founder of the *Baʿth*, Zakī al-Arsūzī, came from the ceded enclave of Alexandretta-Antioch. Deeply angered by the colonial enterprise in Syria and other Arab provinces, al-Arsūzī extolled Arabs in history, vilified Turks, smeared colonialism, and called for a cultural renewal of Arab history or simply *Baʿth*. His nationalistic writings were so chauvinistic that recent Arab intellectual did not shy away from calling him "Arab racist at its worst."[256] Al-Arsūzī was deeply agitated by the seizure of land that upon his relocation to Damascus he wasted no time to launching his jounral al-*Baʿth*. For Al-Arsūzī and his generation, the colonial act of 1939 closed the final chapter on the dream of Greater Syria. Yet, to the consternation of Syrian nationalists, this was not the end but the beginning of a series of amputations that followed. "*When the French finally withdrew in 1946, the country had shrunk to 185,190 square kilometers from the 300,000 square kilometers… The Syrians did not easily recover from the shock of these surgical operations, and the feeling that their country was made smaller, than meant to be, became a continued source of frustration."*[257]

The *Baʿth* led scores of educated people astray. Though it started off deploying noble principles and articulating genuine public feelings, it had destructive ends. The *Baʿth* called for regrouping the now fragmented Arab peoples through bounding them into one single Arab nation. From its inception, the *Baʿth*

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255 Suhayl Idrīs. *Mawāqif Wa-Qaḍāyā Adabīyah*, al-Ṭabʿah 1, Āfāq Al-Ādāb 2 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ādāb, 1977), 27–28.
256 Lafif, "AL-ʿAfif Al-Akhdar: Radi ʿala Qisat Al-Tarabishi Maʿi."
257 Seale and McConville, *Asad of Syria*, 16.

made fighting Western colonialism and feudal landlords its primary nemesis. Yet, it lacked an intellectual backbone as many of its foundational members attested. The overwhelming majority of its rank and file came directly from high schools, provinces, minorities, and most prominently Christians. Its main ideologues Michael ʿAflaq and Ṣalāh al-Bītār were just school teachers. For more than two decades, this party "lacked ideological writings" as ʿAflaq and al-Bītār's "improvised talks" on nationalism and anti-colonialism constituted its main sources of reference.[258] Bītār quickly became known as the head of a party that pandered to the educated bourgeoisie. His criticism focused on the "prevailing order" of the old, aristocratic elite and landowners. Under his leadership, the *Baʿth* became the new challenger of the established system.

It is highly intriguing that the ideology of one of the most influential parties in the Middle East was written by teachers and the bulk of its followers came from high schools. The party and its leaders, argues Ṣafadi, were moved by emotions rather than rational thinking and cold analysis of reality. Tragically, it figured prominently in creating the conditions that misled the Arab world to its humiliating defeat in 1967. The minority mentality making up this party stands as the prime culprit. Dominated by ʿAlawites, who have been looked down upon, and were conceived of as crude and under-educated, the party would take far-flung risks to gain legitimacy among the Sunni majority. A favorite strategy was to whip up hostilities against Israel, an easy way to prove loyalty to Arab cause. Israel knew that and for that very reason some of the Israeli army commanders, notably Yitzhak Rabin, loathed Syria the most among all his Arab adversaries. One journalist noted, "*the easiest way for the Alawis to ingratiate themselves with Syria's Sunni Muslims, who were the majority, was to work even harder to heat up their border with Israel*."[259] With no regard for accountability, the *Baʿth* party dragged unprepared Arab states to one of its most searing defeats at the hand of Israel. Akram Hourani, a prominent leader in the *Baʿth*, constantly pestered Nasser with regard to the presence of the UN forces on the straits of Tiran. According to some accounts, Akram Hourani constantly pushed Nasser to evacuate the UN forces, which were stationed in the straits after the 1956 war to prevent another escalation between Egypt and Israel. Besmirching Nasser

[258] Ṣafadī, *Ḥizb Al-Baʿth, Ma'sāt Al-Mawlid, Ma'sāt Al-Nihāyah*, 71–91.
[259] Bowen, *Six Days*, 14.

through newspapers was a less likely instigator of the war and the defeat in 1967. Yet, if Akram Hourani's cajoling is to be taken as not the most significant cause for the outbreak of the 1967 war, he certainly was a convenient enabler of it. He was a huckster who peddled magical thinking by assuring Syrian policy makers that they could take on Israel and gain victory. After the war, many received scorn and reproach for the defeat, while the *Baʿth* enjoyed full impunity.

When the *Ba'th* took power in the now infamous coup of March 1963, Ṭarābīshī "was mandated by the education ministry to work as the director of the Syrian Radio," a position that he held for "several months."[260] In its first year in power, the *Baʿth* revealed its true militaristic nature.[261] "Almost half of the members in leading positions of the Syrian *Baʿth* Party came from officer ranks."[262] The *Baʿth* inaugurated a new era in Syrian politics by cracking down on Pan-Arabists, executing political dissidents, and even persecuting Nasserists. In 1964, many young and educated Syrians left the party in the wake of the atrocities perpetrated across Syria. Ṭarābīshī conceived some of the harsh criticism for dragging his feet out of the party.[263] He also found himself falling out of favor with the *Baʿth* by 1965. His critical stance of the Baʿth had him "sent to jail for four months."[264]

While in prison, Ṭarābīshī met other ex-*Baʿthists*. Most of them were Christian dissidents from Hurān, who had been in contact with Akram Hourani. His multiple conversations with his ex-Baʿthist cellmates, left him despondently convinced that these so-called *radicals* were actually *reactionaries.* In the course of one dispute over the phenomenon of honor killing of women for having sexual relationships out of wedlock, Ṭarābīshī was aghast to realize that he was the only one to emphatically denounce the antediluvian practice. He was asked whether or not he would have his "daughter (Maya) killed if she had an intimate relationship with someone who is not her husband?" The mere question shocked Ṭarābīshī. "Maya was just two years old," he recalled, "and the mere idea of having her killed was unspeakably

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[260] Tarabishi, "Qisatti maʿ Al-ʿAfif Al-Akhdar."

[261] In 1955, three leading parties in Syria were forcefully disbanded leaving the *Baʿth* to fill the vacuum. Al-Hizb al-Watani, Hizb al-Shab, and al-Hizb al-Suri al-Qawmi al-Ijtima'ī were eliminated under Syrian tyrant Shishikli. Shuwayrī and Abū Fakhr, *Sūrīyah Wa-ḥuṭām Al-Marākib Al-Mubaʿtharah*, 2005, 170.

[262] Bowen, *Six Days*, 14.

[263] Ṣafadī, *Ḥizb Al-Baʿth, Ma'sāt Al-Mawlid, Ma'sāt Al-Nihāyah*.

[264] Tarabishi, "Six Stations in My Life (sitat Mahatat Fi Hayyati)."

atrocious."[265] At that moment, Ṭarābīshī realized that a radical change in mentality ought to precede all changes in society.

*"Ever since [this argument] I learned that the issue is not between Muslim and non-Muslim, Christian and non-Christian…the problem has grown complicated. The issue comes down to the structure of mentality (*bunyat al-ʿql*) in the first place. Inside human brain, there are two stratums: one is on the surface which might be political, progressive, and socialist…the other stratum is beneath it, structural to the mind which is fatally regressive, whether the man is Christian or Muslim. Ever since that day I have a strong conviction that the attitude towards women in society determines the attitude to the world as such. Ever since that day my conviction was hardened more than any time before that we need to struggle in words to bring a change in mentalities, to alter the interior structure of mind, not only the political and ideological surface of the mind."*[266]

Under the spell of Yassin al-Hafiz

After parting ways with the *Baʿth* party in 1965, Ṭarābīshī joined a group of disparate young radicals animated by "Marxist consciousness." A prominent figure in this group was Yāssīn al-Ḥāfiẓ, a genuine thinker and a sharp-minded commentator on Arab politics. Ḥāfiẓ is said to have been the first Marxist in Syria, who jotted down the first principles of the *Baʿth* in the late 1940s before ditching the party altogether.[267] Born in 1930 in northeastern Syrian city of *Deir al-Zur* to a lower middle class family, Ḥāfiẓ would become one of the most eloquent nationalist speakers and a founding father of the short-lived party of *The Arab Revolutionary Workers Party* in 1965. Before his ignominious departure from the *Baʿth* embittered and disenchanted, he served as the party's education attaché. Ḥāfiẓ is better known for propounding ideas of *al-fawāt al-Tārīkhī* "the historical anachronism," *al-Waʿi al-Muṭābik* "corresponding awareness" and the popularizing of "Arab Marxism" instead of international Marxism. The terminology he coined, which he devised in his analysis of Arab societies, gained currency among the generation of the 1960s. In his fascinating autobiography, he wrote, *"It is imperative that Arabs would*

[265] Tarabishi.
[266] Tarabishi.
[267] Samer Frangie, "HISTORICISM, SOCIALISM AND LIBERALISM AFTER THE DEFEAT: ON THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF YASIN AL-HAFIZ," *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 02 (August 2015): 325–52.

not be granted any moment of delusion, submission and surrender. We should make the present regression and oppression (al-taʾkhur wal-iṭṭihaḍ) more conspicuous by instilling an awareness of regression and oppression. Shame should be rendered more ghastly and horrid by spreading it out among people. We should teach people to panic from their reality to give them the temerity to fight back." Amid Syrian intellectuals, Ḥāfiẓ is referred to as the teacher of a generation *'Ustāth al-Jīl.'* He launched two short-lived publishing houses in Beirut but shut down thereafter. Yet, his ideas left a lasting mark on a great number of present-day intellectuals despite their misgivings on his Marxism: Waddah Shararah, Michael Klito, Hazim Saghiyya, Mutaʿ Safadi, and Yasin al-Haj Saleh who belonged to the younger generation. Sadiq Al-Azm is said to have taught his autobiography during his tenure at the American University of Beirut.[268] In 1965, when Ṭarābīshī was released from jail, Ḥāfiẓ's ideas were already firmly established.

In his autobiography *The Defeat and the Defeated Ideology*, Ḥāfiẓ takes what he called Arab Marxism and applies its "tools" to criticize "traditional Arab societies." This work, Ḥāfiẓ states in the introduction, "is a profound critique of the defeat [in 1967] by going, probably for the first time, from criticizing [Arab] politics to critiquing its society."[269] This transformation from criticizing politics, prevalent prior to 1967, to critiquing society marked the growth of a new awareness that was specific to the post-1967 generation.[270] This was among the first points of entry into a cultural critique that would confer much distinction on the works produced by Ṭarābīshī.

The decline of the traditional European empires during World War II, pressed Ḥāfiẓ to embrace the causes championed by Arab liberation movements. He meant to raise awareness of the "regression of Arab societies" as a way to break, what he metaphorically called, "Arab cultural and ideological involution."[271] The idea of "regression" was still in popular usage as an economic aphorism before it

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[268] Karam Nashar, "On Yassin Al-Hafiz: The Man and His Revolutionary Time.," *Al-Jumhuriya* (blog), accessed November 1, 2015, http://aljumhuriya.net/32545.

[269] Ḥāfiẓ, *Hazīmah Wa-Al-īdyūlūjiyā Al-Mahzūmah*, 5.

[270] On the differences between critique and Marxist Critique see: Wendy Brown, "The Sacred, the Secular, and the Profane: Charles Taylor and Karl Marx," In Warner, VanAntwerpen, and Calhoun ed. *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*. Harvard University Press, 20101. P. 83-105.

[271] Yāsīn Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-Tajribah Al-Tārīkhīyah Al-Fiyitnāmīyah: Taqyīm Naqdī Muqārin Maʻa Al-Tajribah Al-Tārīkhīyah Al-ʻArabīyah*, al-Ṭabʻah 2 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalīʻah, 1979), 7.

would assume a cultural signification at Ḥāfiẓ hands. As an Arab Marxist, Ḥāfiẓ was incensed by the link "semi-Marxists" made between "backward and conservative politics, culture, and ideology"[272] on the one side and a "backward economic structure of Arab countries" on the other. He chafed at so-called Marxists because of the "economical and industrial approaches" that seem to "prevail in the climate of ideas."[273] In describing his progress towards political maturity, Ḥāfiẓ unapologetically thanks colonialism for paving the way for traditional and backward Arab societies to engage in *politics* without fear of punishment. Nowhere in his texts he denounces colonialism outright. Quite the opposite, he identified positive aspects in the odious French colonial project in Syria for politicizing Arab society:

"The reality is that although the burden of French colonialism sparked my interest in politics, the colonial (liberal) French suppression did not reach a degree [of cruelty] that forced us to go back to a traditional-psychological temperament, where political tradition is absent and a temperament of escapism and aversion prevails. With colonialism, for the first time in modern Arab experiment, it was possible for Arab subjects to oppose existing authority without getting killed, or seized upon until succumbing on the one hand, and gaining some sort of passive and quiet solidarity from [the rest of] society on the other hand. One is ought to say that the colonial experiment set loose, with no intention, a process of politicizing Arab society, which had not known political tradition before. The removal of colonialism, which was followed by renewed Eastern despotism, marked the beginning of the reverse procedure of liquidating the remains of 'the colonial democracy' and removing politics from society or forcing people to steer clear of politics."[274]

In the national ethos of the late 1960s, this kind of honest testimony is unusual even if new tropes of critique emerged at that juncture. Ḥāfiẓ's type of social-cultural critique of Arab society, which "reverts to eastern despotism" and "fledging democratic tradition fostered by the colonial experiment," would later be taken up and fully developed by Ṭarābīshī. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Ṭarābīshī was profoundly influenced by the ideas of "cultural relapse" or the "reversion to medieval political thinking

[272] Ḥāfiẓ, 6.
[273] Ḥāfiẓ, 12.
[274] Ḥāfiẓ, *Hazīmah Wa-Al-īdyūlūjiyā Al-Mahzūmah*, 14.

and practice," articulated by Ḥāfiẓ. This finds strong embodiment in the idea of *nukus* "regress, recoil, backsliding" and "regression" that Ṭarābīshī elaborates during his years in Paris.

In late 1965 as Ṭarābīshī left the *Baʿth* party after the mayhems it inflected in different cities throughout Syria, he met Ḥāfiẓ and joined the *Syrian Workers Party* in 1965. For Ṭarābīshī, this was the first experiment in organizing politically. This experience will stand to him later on when he launches the Arab Institute for Modern Thought *al-Mūa'ssasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Taḥdīth al-Fikrī* along with Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in Beirut in 2004. However, Ḥāfiẓ was fading from memory as many Arab intellectuals began to show some signs of disillusionment with Marxism during the late 1970s. His attempts to slow down the process proved futile. The publishing house that he established to disseminate his revolutionary ideas lasted only three years, marking the passing of an intellectual brand. With his early death in 1978, at the age of 48, Arab Marxism was in a steep decline. It is in this year that Ṭarābīshī declared his "divorce" from the Marxist ideology.

Translation

In 1964, Ṭarābīshī made a general observation concerning the Arab intellectual scene, which to a certain extent, captured the essence of the historical moment of the time. "Until now," he wrote "we have understood Marxism through whatever was written about it, not through Marx's own [writings]."[275] This statement not only set purpose of this generation clear, but also implied a break with previous generations. In the late 1950s, Arab intellectuals ushered in a new phase in translation of major Western intellectual projects. One scholar of the time remarked, that in Lebanon alone the number of translated books exceeded for the first time those that were authored by Arab scholars.[276] The fact that translated literature overtook and outnumbered Arabic composed books had tremendous effects on the development of new literary tastes and styles of reasoning that Ṭarābīshī grew up embracing.[277] Up until mid-twentieth century, very few western works were available to mass readers in Arabic translation despite the steep engagement with Western scholarship during the nineteenth-century. Yet, Arab intellectuals and readers alike were, in

[275] Ṭarābīshī, *Sārtar Wa-Al-Mārksīyah*, 9.
[276] Idrīs, *Mawāqif Wa-Qaḍāyā Adabīyah*, 29.
[277] One of the best accounts for the politics of translation in the Arab world and their effects on Arab intellectual sensibilities see: Joseph Andoni Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

general, aware of the extensive western intellectual scholarship and tradition, for many of them mastered more than one European language. Some journals kept the Arab reader abreast with the latest intellectual modes in Europe, while Western philosophers also came to the Arab world to teach. The emergence of Arabic journals in the nineteenth century (*al-Muqtataf* and *al-Hillal* in particular) had already created a space for Arabic readers to dabble in western philosophy and science. These journalistic overviews, however, could not achieve more than what good journalism could offer in the form of presenting outlines and summaries of mainstream Western ideas. One example is the translated excerpts of Darwin's works published in these journals in the 1870s, which had stirred a furious debate at the American University in Beirut. The translation of Darwin's entire work, however, had to wait until 1917.[278] Although these scanty translations were necessarily patchy and brief, they nevertheless created social and intellectual commotions.

By mid-twentieth century however, intellectual dynamics had drastically changed. Two groundbreaking literary endeavors set to begin. The first was the establishment of *al-Adab* journal in Beirut in 1953 (that expanded into a publishing house in 1956). Second was the founding of *Dar al-Taliʿah* in 1959. Both *al-Adab* and *al-Taliʿah* embarked on unprecedented undertaking that systematically set to translate works of western intellectuals and philosophers. Unlike the characteristic cherry picking of earlier translation projects, [279] these publishing houses went as far as rendering a great portion of Existential philosophical and literary corpus into Arabic. The founder of the publication house of Al-Adab, Suhayl Idrīs, underscored the significance of the project in an article entitled *"Our Literature and Translation*." In this article, Idrīs took issue with the quality of previous translations, the content of the books selected, and the necessity of translation as a medium through which to catch up with the West. Idrīs assailed translations done in Egypt, branding Egyptians major translators Ahmad Hassan al-Zayyāt and Lutfi al-Manflūtti's selections as "unfaithful translations" *Tarjammāt al-Khiyyānah.* He also brushed

[278] Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[279] Tahtawi was the first to oversee one of the innovative translation projects in nineteenth century that made more than 2000(!) western books to Arabic. According to some historians the translations had no method, lacked any systematic style and for the most part were random. Ibrahim A. Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe; a Study in Cultural Encounters*, Oriental Studies Series, no. 22 (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1963). P. 46-52.

aside literal word-for-word translations as worthless. Instead, he identified two objectives behind the process of translation: "first, reliability in rendering the foreign text, and second, adapting Arabic and [Arab] reason to new styles of expression and thought."[280] Idrīs expressed a noticeable disdain to translations that "do not shed new light…on the path to freedom." Included in his list of useless translations were those of "Hugo and Shakespeare." He nonetheless highlighted the necessity of translating works that engage relevant and ontological issues. *"In reality, foreign works that address issues reflecting Arab concerns in this historical moment- for instance fighting colonialism in all of its forms, denouncing cruelty and aggression, advocating for freedom and justice, struggling to liberate society from the shackles that impede creative possibilities, and manifestly expressing different shades of anxiety that stormed the subject in his pursuit of a meaningful existence- these foreign works that deal with this kind of issues, which every single Arab encounters today, are the most fruitful and valuable works."*[281]

Ṭarābīshī entered the field of translation in the early 1960s at the time when the number of Arab universities in the Middle East began to surge, reaching 23 in number by 1969.[282] No doubt, Ṭarābīshī was an able translator. However, it was due to the environment in which he worked, that helped him pursue his career as a translator and later as an intellectual. At the turn of the 1960s, Ṭarābīshī graduated from Damascus University to find a conducive field that assisted him to cultivate his skills. The timing could not have been more apt. He rode the translation tide that swept across the Middle East. He took the pulse and was quick to respond to it. Existentialism was all the rage and he was the right man in the right place.[283]

I resigned from teaching and from media and decided to live off a translating [career]. I remember translating Simon de Buovour in 1000 pages "Intellectuals" for 2000 Lebanese Lira. Obviously, the value

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[280] Idrīs, *Mawāqif Wa-Qaḍāyā Adabīyah*. P.32.
[281] Ibid. 33.
[282] Sultan Abu-Orabi, "Higher Education & Scientific Research in the Arab World" (German-Rectors' Conference (HRK), Bonn/Germany, December 2013), 18, http://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-07-Internationales/02-07-15-Asien/02-07-15-1-Jordanien/Higher_Education_in_the_Arab_World_Dr_Sultan.pdf.
[283] One historian of Iraq writes "One of the major catalysts that affected the thinking of Iraqi and indeed all Arab intellectuals was the writings of Jean Paul Sarter... Intellectuals were greatly attracted to Sarter's view of a committed writer as a man reflecting on the events of his age and society." See: Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009), 89–90.

of Lira was not that of today's. It was like $800 or $900 in today's currency value. At that time, I could live in Syria on $100 a month. Thus, I decided to live off translation, no matter the income. I quitted all of my previous jobs and dedicated my time to translation. Of course, not all my translations were good."[284]

Translation was an indispensable part of Ṭarābīshī's intellectual evolution. Unlike writing, translation served as a source of income for new graduates. Suhayl Idrīs commented on his financial concerns that was met by translation: "many asked me about the reason behind the paucity of my writings or even its absence in recent years. I respond that among other reasons, I needed to provide for my family…I resorted to other activities to make ends meet. Among these activities was translating jobs or academic work (writing the dictionary.)"[285]

Some scholars estimated that Ṭarābīshī translated more than 100 European classic works.[286] The translation of these books, far from making him rich, only provided him with a meagre sum to live a decent life. After 1970, the number of Arab students, the main consumers of Ṭarābīshī's translations, rose tenfold. For instance, in Saudi Arabia alone, which had zero student enrollment in 1957, boasted 7000 registered students in 1970. In 2010, it hit one million enrolled undergraduate and graduate students.[287] All these students around the Arab world read these European works in Arabic through *al-Ādāb* and *al-Taliʿah* publishing houses with which Ṭarābīshī worked.

As a student, Ṭarābīshī recalls, he was bombarded with Existential literature throughout his studies. He notes, *"My first dream in the realm of culture was to translate the original text that contained the idea of iltizam-commitment [to Arabic], so that this idea comes out of its cloudiness and puts down roots [in Arabic literature]. As a freshman or sophomore at Damascus University, I started translating the complete text of Sartre's "What's Literature."* This was the first book Ṭarābīshī had ever translated at the age of 21. He continues, *"Since the idea of iltizam prevailed in Arab cultural climate, it was not hard for*

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[284] Mamduh al-Mihini, "Hiwar Ma' Tarabishi," *Jasad Al-Thaqafa*, no. 15123 (November 19, 2009).
[285] Idrīs, *Mawāqif Wa-Qaḍāyā Adabīyah*, 64.
[286] Walid Muhmod Khalis, *Law kāna Fūltīr 'Arabīyan?*, 2015, 14–15.
[287] "U.S. News Releases 2015 Best Arab Region Universities Rankings - US News," US News & World Report, accessed May 29, 2015, http://www.usnews.com/education/arab-region-universities/articles/us-news-ranks-best-arab-region-universities.

me to find a publisher. It was Zūher Ba ʿalbaki, the owner of al-maktab al-tijāri li-Nashir, who paid me a symbolic amount of money so that I gave up the rights of its publication."[288]

The translation of *Mā al-Adāb* was not free of pitfalls however. After a brief excitement, Ṭarābīshī realized that some mistakes had found their way into his translation. Luckily, the first edition run out sooner than he had expected. Ṭarābīshī's success surpassed his wildest dream. His translations of Sartre brought him great popularity and more opportunities in the nascent job market as it started rolling in. An offer came his way from Beirut, the cultural hub of the Arab world in midcentury. Ṭarābīshī also realized that in order to pursue an intellectual career, he had to follow in the footsteps of his Syrian colleagues who left Damascus to Beirut among them Gada al-Saman, Yassin al-Hafiz, Nizar Qabbani, Adonis, Sadiq al-Azm, Burhan Galun and many others. Beirut of the mid twentieth century bode well to dissident and defying voices. It also undertook an economical boost.

IN LEBANON

Beirut of the 1960s offered a vibrant social life with cinema, theater, and intellectual salons being the beating heart of the city. Cafes were marked by publishers; streets named after writers, and entire boulevards were dedicated to book stores. Following its independence, Lebanon turned into an economic center in the Arab world as petro-dollars from the Gulf States poured in. Pioneering the drive to modernization, Beirut was the second city in the Middle East to electrify residences. "In 1912, light came to Egypt. Two years later it kindled excitement and bedazzled people by modernity in Beirut 1914."[289] These electricity projects reduced the burden of "unpaid labor on women, by making household work less time consuming, thereby freeing up time for paid work outside the home."[290] For a good reason women in Beirut and Cairo were the first in the Arab world to establish journals and to hold intellectual salons.

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[288] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Harṭaqāt*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 ([France?] : Beirut: Rābiṭat al-ʿAqlānīyīn al-ʿArab ; Dār al-Sāqī, 2006), 149. "One of the major catalysts that affected the thinking of Iraqi and indeed all Arab intellectuals was the writings of Jean Paul Sarter... Intellectuals were greatly attracted to Sarter's view of a committed writer as a man reflecting on the events of his age and society."89-90

[289] Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 16.

[290] Rachel Vogelstein, "Let Women Work," *Foreign Affairs*, December 12, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2017-12-12/let-women-work.

What set Beirut apart was its expressive and educated middle class. Thanks to an open-door policy, it drew writers from mostly agrarian cities into a pluralistic and diverse population. Banished and outcast intellectuals from Iraq, Arabia, Tunisia, and Sudan all found refuge in Beirut. Its coastline transformed into a vast trading center, sustaining its middle class and intellectual spirit. Trade with other centers of commerce in the Mediterranean formed its backbone. According to Fawaz Trablisi, Beirut was, probably, the only Arab country that benefited from the creation of Israel in 1948. Before 1948, the rivalry with the port of Haifa threatening to undermine Beirut's prosperous business as Haifa's port was substantially expanding. Beiruti's political and financial elites expressed concerns towards the rapidly developing Jewish port in Haifa that might steal business from Beirut. The 1948 war and the armistices that followed, however, put an end to that threat. Arabs of the east blocked trading with and from Haifa port while increasing their exports and imports dependency on Lebanon. After World War II, the Lebanese markets showed a spike in their economic sphere. Some of this money sustained the effervescence intellectual activity.[291]

Many Syrian writers, poets, and journalists with diverse intellectual records flocked to Beirut in search of more opportunities. Even singers and actors lavished in the liberal mood Beirut afforded and protected. Meanwhile Palestinians exiles established a vast network of intellectual activity in Beirut. The writers Nabīl Sulaymān from Aleppo and Abu ʿAli Yāssīn from Damascus moved to Beirut in spring of 1979 to avoid a "tight job market" in Syria. In Beirut, the two began "timidly seeking for jobs in one of the multiple cultural institutions that Beirut featured." When the "vague answers came in" they concluded that "every cultural institution belonged to or was [tied to] a different Palestinian revolutionary group." To find work, they had to "concede affiliation and dependence [to Palestinian factions]"[292] In reality, not all the cultural institutions in Beirut were under Palestinian financial payroll the way these two Syrian intellectuals convey. New literary journals emerged as a generation of young and passionate scholars came of age.

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[291] Fawwāz Ṭarābulsī, *Qaḍiyat Lubnān Al-Waṭanīyah Wa-Al-Dimuqrāṭīyah*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Dār al- *al-Taliʿah* lil-Ṭibāʿah wa-al-Nashr, 1978), 11–12.

[292] Nabil Sulayman, "Abu Ali Yassin: Ahad Wujuh Al-Fikr Al-Naqdi (A Pillar of Critical Thinking)," *Alawan.org*, April 19, 2009, http://www.alawan.org/article4794.html.

A prominent writer who played a significant role in shaping the literary scene of Beirut in the 1960s-1980s, and the intellectual trajectory of young Ṭarābīshī was Suhayl Idrīs. In Beirut, Idrīs filled the role that Yāssīn al-Ḥāfiẓ had had towards Ṭarābīshī back in Damascus. Born in 1925, Idrīs attended a religious school but carried on his education in the Sorbonne, between 1948-1952.[293] During his four years in Paris Idrīs reached out to many Arab writers to prepare the ground for the creation of his journal *Al-Ādāb,* which he later turned to an exuberant publishing house in 1956. As he made it clear from his exchanging letters with the Egyptian novelist, Anoūr al-Maʿdawi, upon his return to Beirut, Idrīs quickly established *Al-Ādāb* magazine in 1953. He received aid from veteran publishers in Beirut, namely Bahīj ʿUthman and Munir Baʿalbaki who owned *Dar Al-ʿIlm Lilmalayyin* (est. in 1945.) Both of these publishers would also publish articles in his new journal to endow it with some prestige. ʿUthman, in particular, was an expert on Arab books so his writings in *Al-Ādāb* concentrated on survays of translations and new books in Arabic.

Idrīs excelled in fostering a broad network of scholars. His connections and acquaintances spanned a great spectrum of scholars.[294] Not only did he exchange letters with writers in Cairo,[295] the epicenter of Arab letters, he also accepted entries from semi-peripheral places like Morocco. In particular, promising writers, poets, and journalists had exchanged with Idrīs and published in *Al-Ādāb*. Between 1956 to 1992, the years in which he was the chief editor of *Al-Ādāb*, he extended the reach of his journal to Bagdad, Arabia and further east. Bagdad at 1960s was a significant "center for the book market" for many Lebanese publishing houses. "Close to 1000-1500 copies of every book published by *Dar al-Taliʿah* would be sent to Iraq"[296] writes Ṭarābīshī. Numerous Baghdadi poets published in Idrīs' journal: Al-Bayati (b. 1926) Nazik al-Malaʾika (b. 1923) and, in particular, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (b.1926). Al-Sayyab wrote to Idrīs that "Iraqi radical writers and readers were more interested in new progressive values in economics,

[293] Suhayl Idriss. *Dikrayāt al-adab wa-al-ḥubb* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ādāb, 2001), 106. He earned a Ph.D. in Arabic literature after his adviser, the well-known historian of Islam, Levi-Provencal turned him down. Idrīs turned to Gegis Blachere to supervise him through his dissertation on the "*Foreign influences on Arabic Fiction from 1900-1940*."

[294] In an obituary to Idrīs, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* said that Idrīs was the first to publish Najib Mahfouz's "'Awlad Haritna" as Nassir banned it in Egypt. Susan Abtah, "Writer and Publisher the Repelious Suhayl Idrīs Passed Away While Leaving Al-Adab to His Relatives," *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, February 20, 2008.

[295] Suhayl Idriss, *Dikrayāt al-adab wa-al-ḥubb* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ādāb, 2001).

[296] Tarabishi, "*Qisatti Maʿ Al-ʿAfif Al-Akhdar*."

politics, and culture than in the values of the past"[297] capturing the spirit of the 1960s. In 1955, Idrīs founded the "Independent Pen Association" with Raʾif Khouri and Husayn Muruwwah. The following year Suhayl Idrīs married ʿAida Matarji and, in the same year, founded the *Dar Al-Adab* publishing house in collaboration with the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani. The latter, however, opted out in the early 1960s as he preferred to follow a diplomatic career with the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1967, Qabbani would resume his literary career, which placed him at such heights to be coveted by many.

Ṭarābīshī would have most of his Existential translations of Albert Camus, Sartre and de Bouvour published in this publishing house. Initially, his relations with Suhayl Idrīs was merely economic until Ṭarābīshī embraced existentialism more thoroughly, a shared interest that brought them closer to each other. Idrīs' writings were influenced by existentialism but fused the two intellectual currents of nationalism and modernity, two topics that informed Ṭarābīshī.[298] In 1968, Idrīs founded the Lebanese Writers' Union with a number of nationalist scholars like Constantine Zurayk, Joseph Mughayzel, and the Syrian poet Adonis. He served as its secretary-general for three consecutive terms, and again in 1989 and in 1991. It was through Suhayl Idrīs and his broad network that young Ṭarābīshī entered the field of Arab letters in Beirut. As a translator and lexicographer, Idrīs was keen to render into Arabic much needed French literature on existentialism. During his sojourn in Paris, from 1948 to 1952, he witnessed firsthand the strength and profundity of the French intellectual idiom and discourse on existentialism. He realized that in order to bring this philosophy to mass Arab readers he needed to apprentice excellent and promising young people with a flair for intellectual engagement.

Ṭarābīshī settled in *Al-Jadidah* neighborhood (in East Beirut), not far away from *Dār al-Taliʿah*. Idrīs reached out to Ṭarābīshī and asked him to translate some works by Jean Paul Satre. Ṭarābīshī acknowledges his close relations with Idrīs. *"My connections to Dār al-Ādāb, its journal, and its owner began to grow stronger. I had achieved to its account the translation of Simon de Bouvour's novel "intellectuals", which was, as far as I'm concerned, one of the linchpins in iltizam literature."*[299] In Fact,

[297] Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 91.
[298] Farouq Maussi, "A Reading into the Biography of Suhayl Idriss," *Rabitat Adaba' Al-Sham*, October 22, 2005,
[299] Ṭarābīshī, *Harṭaqāt*, 151.

Suhayl Idrīs wrote his French-Arabic dictionary, *al-Manhal*, to facilitate the introduction of Existentialism to Arabic logo-sphere. It was of immense help to Ṭarābīshī who used it as a reference for years in his translations from French to Arabic.

The prime days of Beirut would not last long however. In 1975, the whole structure in which an intellectual vibrancy flourished began to crumble under the weight of a savage civil war that wrecked the foundations of its educated class. This war spooked writers from wondering around, meet each other, and exchange ideas in cafes and book stores. In the thick of the Lebanese civil war, as one of Ṭarābīshī's acquaintances stated, "Ṭarābīshī rarely took the risk to drive to his workplace in *Dār al-Taliʿah*."[300] This war signaled the end of Ṭarābīshī's hope for an Arab world where people from different ethnicities and religious backgrounds would live in harmony or together side by side. Ṭarābīshī would not leave Beirut until 1984, eight years into the war. In late 1983, however, the situation in Beirut becomes unbearable for Ṭarābīshī. On October 23, 1983, the French and the U.S. headquarters of the Multi-National force was bombed. With 241 American troops and 40 French dead, the civil war took yet another dangerous turn. In February of the following year, the so-called Lebanese Army melted away due to numerous defections from among the ranks of the Muslim and Druze military personnel. One month later, in March 1984 - U.S. Marines withdrew from Lebanon, leaving a scorched land with little hope of salvation. The war atrocities left no sense of security for Ṭarābīshī, a no security heaven, who fled to Paris to save his life. Beside *al-Manhal* of Idrīs, he took with him another book, *The Formation of Arab Thought* by the Moroccan writer Mohammad ʿAbid Al-Jabiri. This was the last book Ṭarābīshī reviewed for publication before leaving his lifetime job at *Dār al-Taliʿah*. He recommended it strongly to Bashir al-Daʿuk, the owner and founder of this publication, before his departure to Paris.[301]

Conclusion

Post-colonial Syria, where Ṭarābīshī grew up, pitted the emergent politics of the young generation against those of the *ancien regime*. Three channels facilitated the rise of young men like Ṭarābīshī, who favored Arab unity as an option in the way to prevail politically: the army, ideologically driven parties,

[300] Sulayman, "Bou Ali Yassin: Ahad Wujuh Al-Fikr Al-Naqdi (A Pillar of Critical)."
[301] Interview with Tarabishi. 21 May 2014 in his apartment in Paris.

and education. Ṭarābīshī's life offers a perfect example of how men and women climbed the social ladder through education. Most of the existing literature on Syria offers numerous exemplary stories in which individuals break with traditions and rose to leading positions through either an ideologically driven party[302] or the newly established military institution.[303] Very few works, however, account for the third channel, namely the revolution in Syria's educational landscape, which like the army and political parties, helped mold new identities and sensibilities that were incongruent with old traditions. Ṭarābīshī's life and intellectual journey from Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut saw a young and an ordinary middle class guy whose ideas reached every corner of the Middle East.

Ṭarābīshī's experience throughout these year converges with the broader experience of a broader generation of the Arab Left. Ever since his religious classes, Ṭarābīshī fostered a deep dissatisfaction with religion and traditions. This education left a lifelong taste and commitments that informed his visions in the future. His education in religious school, the tragic encounter with his theology teacher, the constant displacements, and his translations of new Western ideologies shaped his long-running aesthetics and outlooks. Though in the subsequent years Ṭarābīshī would harshly judge this "ideological episode," of his life and turn to the study new subjects, Ṭarābīshī's main premises and principles took shape in this time of his development. His revolutionary sentiment, the antipathy toward traditional authorities, and the discontent with compromised regimes, topics that informed the climate of ideas during the first three decades after independence run deep into Ṭarābīshī's thought and writings.

His vision and politics all pointed to a scholar with unmistakable admiration to Western thought. Educated by many scholars, many of whom are exposed and aware of European intellectual traditions, Ṭarābīshī was weaned on a view that thought ill of traditional Arab society and conceived Western modernity as the only path for renewal and progress. His radicalism was reflected in his writings on Arab women, ideology, and social classes. He employed Marxist idiom, with its rigid categories and classification, to discredit the old guard, traditional parties, and conservatives. Though his progressive

[302] Itamar Rabinovich, *Syria under the Baʿth, 1963-66; the Army Party Symbiosis*, Shiloah Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. Monograph Series (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972).
[303] Seale and McConville, *Asad of Syria*.

position walked him out of the religious domain, Ṭarābīshī rarely thought of religion or the past as viable sources of knowledge. In the contrary, like many of his generation of post-colonial writers, Ṭarābīshī thought that progress means following European model.

In the next three decades of his life however, Ṭarābīshī would engage in the Ṭurāth, giving a critical example to one of the most significant turnabout that happened to progressive and revolutionary Arab intellectuals. Ṭarābīshī's turn to study a topic that he thought to be beneath him, upends longstanding conventions in the field of Arab thought and stir much confusion among observers. The next chapter discusses the emerge of the Ṭurāth as a central site of intellectual discourse, a new field of study that is not limited to the recreation of the past, but also, and in crucial ways, the articulation of a new vision of the meaning of post-colonial condition.

CHAPTER IV: FROM THAWRAH TO TURĀTH: THE REVIVAL OF THE 19TH CENTURY LIBERAL THOUGHT

Of all his writings, in no place do Jūrj Ṭarābīshī's character and vulnerabilities become so visible as in his writing on the Turāth. Ṭarābīshī's frank confessions reinforce the impression that when he writes on the Turāth, he also writes on himself and the experience of his revolutionary generation. Saturating his later writings on the Turāth with reflections and retrospections on past moments in Arab thought bestow on these writings an undiminished historical sense. "I'm not a historian, I'm only a cultural critic," he emphatically responded when asked how he defines himself.[304] Yet, the sporadic comments and thoughts on his career trajectory provide historians of Arab thought with a unique perspective on the way Arab Leftists view and re-appreciate their own failures and setbacks.

In the late 1990s, as he dove into the sea of the Turāth, Ṭarābīshī conceded that most of his previous "wagers were all but misguiding." His previous bets on nationalist, existentialist, and Marxism were ineffective, he professed.[305] These ideologies, it dawned on him belatedly, have steered him and many likeminded members of the Arab Left away from dealing with people's biases, assumptions, religious prejudices and sectarianism. Disenchanted with his former ideologies, Ṭarābīshī argues that true intellectuals fail to fulfill their duty when they avoid the inevitable clash with "the masses," namely, people's believes, its culture and sensitivities. For Ṭarābīshī, there is no use in third world intellectuals who fall short of dislocating entrenched cultural attitudes, suspecting public morality and unsettling conventional social norms. Rather than caving in to an obsolete value system and age-long traditions, Ṭarābīshī now called into question the added value Arab intellectuals place on their heritage, asking what emotional and cultural possibilities are facilitated by the new focus on the Turāth.

Ṭarābīshī had always been baffled by the magnificent treasures of the Turāth, the creative poetry, genuine philosophy, daring music, abstract art, Islamic astronomy, "Arab humanism," and even the diverse modes of sexuality. Yet Arab intellectuals' enrapture with this compendium of texts and models

[304] Interview with Ṭarābīshī in his apartment in Paris. May 22, 2014. This was the last interview that he made before passing away in April 2016. Though he looked frail and unwell, he spoke to me for four hours on the dangerous intellectual trends of the Arab world.

[305] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. *Min Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Riddah: Tamazzuqāt Al-Thaqāfah Al-ʿArabīyah Fī ʿAṣr Al-ʿawlamah*. Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2000. Introduction.

of beings has equally unsettled him. The growing mania for the Turāth, which he called "collective neurosis," meant for Ṭarābīshī that the relatively progressive Arab intelligentsia had begun looking past Europe and modernity, while turning to the Arab-Islamic past for original and authentic solutions to modern-day challenges that face Arab societies. As far as he is concerned, this intellectualism around the Turāth has far-reaching consequences with regard the path Arab nations would take, next generations' training and school curricula. As a scholar who spent the best part of his intellectual career translating Western ideas and theories into Arabic, Ṭarābīshī felt betrayed and left behind in the wake of new intellectual trends in the Arab world. Nothing in his translations of the most progressive ideas in Europe anticipated the new trends in Arab thought. Nothing in his writings of the 1960s seemed now to resonate in the new age of Arab authenticity. As his hopes of turning the Middle East around by exposing its people to new ideas proved ineffective and vacuous, everything was stripped away from Ṭarābīshī except the weapon of critique (Silāḥ al-Naqd). Calling for self-reflection and insisting on the advantageous value of critique, he writes that "critique is the supreme mode of thought."[306]

In the years after fleeing Beirut in 1984, Ṭarābīshī focused his intellectual analysis on one major problematic (problématique *Ishkāliyya*) from which other secondary themes emerged. This problematic revolved around the history of knowledge in Arab and Islamic societies. Conceding that different people organize their knowledge differently, Ṭarābīshī was interested in exploring the ways knowledge is articulated in different times within the historical experience of the Arab people.[307] Initially he was intrigued by the question of when do people revise their values and morals that for long held them together. For this question, he offered the classical answer: people's perceptions and their collective consciousness are subjected to change by "external shocks" (like the shock Napoleon inflicted on the Arab world when he invaded Egypt in three days in 1798.) People also test their assumptions when hit by unexpected trauma

[306] Ṭarābīshī's ideas against the turn to the past were informed by his previous readings and translations of Marx. "The struggle against the political present of the Germans," Marx wrote, "is a struggle against the past of the modern nations, who are still continually importuned by the reminiscences of this past." Robert C. Tucker, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, eds., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed (New York: Norton, 1978), 56.

[307] See for example his article "who Murdered the Translation Movement in Islam," in Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. *Harṭaqāt*. Beirut: Rābiṭat al-ʿAqlānīyīn al-ʿArab ; Dār al-Sāqī, 2006; on the modes of knowledge production see also: Ṭarābīshī, *Min Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Riddah*; Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. *Min Islām Al-Qur'ān Ilá Islām Al-Ḥadīth: Al-Nash'ah Al-Musta'nafah*. Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī : Rābiṭat al-ʿAqlānīyīn al-ʿArab, 2010).

(like the defeat in 1967 when Israel blew away three Arab armies in six days.)[308] Ṭarābīshī also was inclined to inquire how modern Arab people shifted from one mode of knowledge production to another. One example that Ṭarābīshī reiterated often in his interviews as well as in his recent writing addresses the question of how to explain the dramatic change in the main frame of reference in the contemporary Arab world. How did European cultural references lose their resonance in favor of Turāthic cultural references? During the years 1940-1970, Ṭarābīshī argued, Arab thought developed along the progressive versus backwardness (al-takkadumiyyah v. al-Rag'īyyah.) This formula was the "unifying theme" around which Arab political discourse took its shape. After the 1970s, however, Arab political discourse featured a different formula that foregrounded believer versus unbeliever (mu'min v. kāfir). Contending that the turn to theological vocabulary is a natural outgrowth of the massive turn to the Turāth, Ṭarābīshī's thoughts focused on the different ways to counter this intellectual wave. Remarkably, one of the main strategies he came up with was to readopt the *nahḍa*, the nineteenth century Arab awakening, which he previously rejected. Insisting that authorizing the *nahḍa* over the Turāth, he endowed the Arab notion of the *nahḍa* with the prescriptive capacity to counter the backslide towards the Turāth. In one of his interviews he maintained that "Our hope [today] hinges upon the renewal of the *nahḍa*." For Ṭarābīshī, the *nahḍa* provides the right antidote to the current erosion of Arab rationalism. "The renewal of the *nahḍa* means to yield before reason again [by] making reason the supreme authority over religion."[309]

What was so unique in the *nahḍa* that Ṭarābīshī valorized it? What are the ways in which the *nahḍa* affords to counteract the argument to the return to the Turāth? Ṭarābīshī was not alone in calling for a new engagement with the *nahḍa* in the late 1990s. In fact, scores of Arab secular critics resorted to the *nahḍa* to address the cultural challenges of the post-colonial condition. Sadiq Jalāl al-Azm reiterated many times that his critique of theology takes its cue and inspiration from the pioneers of the *nahḍa*.[310] In Tunisia, many secular critics had recently dug into *nahḍa* literature to retrieve forgotten *nahḍa*wi

[308] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn Al-'Arab Wa-Al-Turāth: Al-Taḥlīl Al-Nafsī Li-'iṣābin Jamā'ī* (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 1991)..

[309] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī in an interview with *al-Riyyad* newspaper. See Ibrahim 'Abdi, "Anā Usami Nafsi Mashru'an Democratiyyan,'" *Thaqafat Al-Yaum*, June 8, 2006, http://www.alriyadh.com/161158.

[310] Sadek Jalal al-Azm and Abu Fakhr, "Trends in Arab Thought: An Interview with Sadek Jalal Al-Azm," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (1998): 68–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/2538285.

figures.[311] The turn to the *nahḍa* during the last decade of the twentieth century raises the following question: why did secular intellectuals resort to embracing the *nahḍa* after having been dismissive of it in earlier years? How should one explain this shift in their attitudes? Why were these secular critics calling to go beyond the *nahḍa* during the 1960s while in the late 1990s they saw it as starting point or a new beginning? Why did the *nahḍa* change from being almost a relic of a "forgotten era" to a new and compelling frame of reference?

The renewed attention to the *nahḍa* had been extensive, far beyond the narrow academic circles and pedantic scholars' debates. The conversation on the *nahḍa* echoed in public spaces. Only a few months before his tragic assassination in 2005, Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir had dedicated a book in which he commended the *nahḍa* and called for espousing its (optimist) spirit. Decrying the neglect of the *nahḍa* among younger Arab generations, Kassir proposed a return to the *nahḍa* as a way to counter the mounting challenges of the post-colonial state (what he calls "Arab malaise".) The *nahḍa* not only provides a healthy corrective path to the ubiquitous pessimism that pervades Arab intellectual circles, it reflects, for Kassir, the first attempt in Arab thought to desacralize the past and de-pathologize its beginning. Now disregarded and unremembered, Kassir bemoaned, very few continue to appreciate this era: "the *nahḍa* is forgotten, except perhaps by an elite that is still attached to the spirit of the Enlightenment. Yet it would be impossible to exaggerate the benefits of restoring this era to its proper place in Arab history. It may perhaps not reveal tailor-made formulas for putting an end to the malaise, but at least it would allow one to reinterpret this malaise as a moment in history."[312] Kassir never lived to see how his book was received. His eulogists, however, took note of his insistence on the value of the *nahḍa*.

Looking into the life career of Ṭarābīshī, whose early reservations and misgivings gave way to an unstinting approval of the *nahḍa*, this chapter reconstructs the historical and cultural conditions that led a generation of Arab Left intellectuals to re-adopt the *nahḍa* at the end of their careers. Starting off with the radical displacements the defeat in 1967 incurred, the historical analysis presented here demonstrates how the first writings after the defeat held the transient promise to surpass the framework of the *nahḍa*, only

[311] Ben Slama, Manhal Sarraj, and Muhammad Saddam. *al-Mar'ah wa-ḥijābuhā* (Damascus: Dar Bitra lil-Nashir, 2009).
[312] Samir Kassir. *Being Arab.* London: Verso, 2013. p. 40–41.

to be muted by the Arab regimes' unduly anxiety over the growing power of the Left. The first angry responses by Arab secular critics to the defeat unleashed adverse effects that instead of empowering the Arab Left had debilitated them, leading to the Silent Decade of the 1970s, when the intellectual climate was cleared for the rise of the Turāth framework. Yet, as the Turāth came to dominate Arab thought during the last two decades of the century, the fate of the Arab Left was not sealed. At the beginning of the 1990s, they would rebrand themselves around an anti-Turāth agenda. No other Arab intellectual captures these vicissitudes in Arab thought like Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, whose writings and career personified the transitions and shifts in the modes of post-colonial Arab thought.

A Divided Decade

In late 1983, Ṭarābīshī tendered his resignation letter to Bashir al-Daouk, notifying him of his plans to quit the editorial board of Dār al-Ṭaliʿah with which he worked for the last twelve years. Ṭarābīshī's resignation implied that both the Arab Left and its institutions had fallen on hard times as the civil war in Beirut devastated the old and pluralist Beirut. In deep despair over the relentless sectarian war, Ṭarābīshī began groping for an escape from the smoking city of Beirut after having seen his own library set on fire.[313] Ironically, the publisher Daouk received Ṭarābīshī's resignation letter from Paris as he preceded Ṭarābīshī in fleeing Beirut, signaling the lowest point the previously glorious Arab Left had reached. With their exile to Paris, Dār al-Ṭaliʿah, a major mouthpiece that gave Arab Left a voice in the tumultuous ideological debates of the 1960s and galvanized them into a coherent group, saw its end approach.

The Arab Left had been in a steep decline since the beginning of 1970s as many of the formerly keen Arab Marxists began renouncing Marxism. Ṭarābīshī attributed the inherent weaknesses of the Arab Left to their excessive focus on politics at the expense of culture. While many Arab intellectuals craved political change, he said, they only begrudgingly accepted the concomitant cultural changes. In the current Arab literature, there is a growing consensus that Arab Leftist ideologies began losing their previous luster for two reasons: first, they failed to unchain Arab people from their primordial loyalties. Second, they

[313] Interview with Ṭarābīshī in May 22, 2015.

propounded progressive ideas in a crude manner that drove many away from these ideas, making it harder for them to readily embrace Western ideas. Namely, the Arab Left was unduly radical in the late 1960s and tried to foist ideas upon their traditional community that spooked people away, rather than allaying their daily anxieties. Moreover, the Arab Left of the 1960's antagonized wary Arab regimes that suffered from an extreme shortage of self-confidence as military coups were part of the political norm. These Arab regimes, taking extra measures to eliminate enemies, were in no position to tolerate the critical Arab Left. The trajectory of the secular idea, for example, encapsulates the tragedy of Arab Left's callous record in this regard. In a letter an old Arab Leftist, Ṭarābīshī suggested an explanation for why the Arab Left was weakened and suspended during the decade of the 1970s. He pointed out to his friend the backlash that Azm's work on *Critique of Theology* generated.[314]

To better appreciate why Ṭarābīshī ended up taking the *nahḍa* path, one should historically reconstruct the moment of decline within the Arab Left. For Ṭarābīshī's recourse to advocate the *nahḍa* hinges on the decline of the Arab Left. During the 1970s, a backlash against the radical Left hit the core of their ideas and ideologies hard. Their works, inscribed within the political rage and under the long shadow of the defeat, were culturally insensitive to public emotions. The works that the radical Leftist Ṣādik Jalāl al-ʿAẓm released unleashed a series of outrageous reactions. In *Critique of Theological Thought* (1969), ʿAẓm elevated religion to a "category of thought" that feeds metaphysical thinking in contemporary Arab thought. Though dozens of Marxists and militant authors had alluded to the adverse role religion plays in society, it was not before *Critique of Theological Thought* that religion was explicitly subjected to an honest and explicit critique and charged with obstructing progress in Arab societies.[315] Unveiling the pernicious effects religion (Islam and Christianity) inflicts on Arab society, ʿAẓm insisted that in light of the absence of a rigorously binding materialistic and scientific method in Arab societies, "religious knowledge" destined to fill the void. ʿAẓm was the first to publicly condemn "religion" as "the imaginative substitute to science."[316]

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[314] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, "Qisatī Maʿ Al-ʿAfīf Al-Akhdar," *Hakaekonline.com*, July 7, 2013.
[315] Hisham Sharabi, "Cultural Critics of Contemporary Arab Society," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1987): 1–19.
[316] Ṣādiq Jalāl ʿAẓm, *Naqd Al-Fikr Al-Dīnī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1969).

ʿAẓm's radical ideas were among the first bold responses to the cultural outrage stirred by the defeat in 1967.[317] This endeavor to undermine the structure of feeling and "religious orthodoxy," as secular critics in the Arab world like to say, was applauded by many for setting in motion a new style of writing uncommon to previous generations.[318] Many historians described ʿAẓm's radical ideas as launching a new era in Arab thought.[319] Yet others began talking of the emergence of Arb cultural critics.[320] True, these works gave some identity and coherence to an otherwise amorphous Arab Left. Adamant to associate himself with the "progressive parties" of the Left, Ṭarābīshī uncritically subscribed to this anti-religious notion, which he later regretted.

While many western observers commended ʿAẓm's audacity and boldness for the initial inroads in the quite conformist Arab intellectual thought, they rarely, if ever, attended to the politics his books generated. The minor changes ʿAẓm's works made (in questioning faith in particular) were soon reversed in the ensuing years, as Ṭarābīshī confided to his readers in the letter. "The public hysteria these books provoked" led many Arab regimes to enact and endorse "a new set of strict policies on the publication of books on Arab Leftist thought,"[321] which markedly enfeebled the quality of their translations and dulled their critical drive. This moratorium on free thinking suspended the secular thrust that ʿAẓm had launched for another decade. In retrospect, ʿAẓm's attempt to make Islam a problem, namely to reconfigure the cultural view of Islam as a liability rather than an asset, proved premature and unrealistic, concludes Ṭarābīshī.

With the palpable retreat of the ideologies of the Arab Left, the intellectual climate was cleared for the partisan of the Turāth to pitch in. Meanwhile, many readers could not hide their frustration with Arab Leftist writings that not only grew more ideological, but also engaged in dry topics that seemed far removed from the challenges of daily life and economic hardship. Many among the ranks of the Arab Left

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317 Emmanuel Sivan, *Interpretations of Islam: Past and Present* (Princeton, N.J: Darwin Press, 1985).
318 Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*, SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
319 Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabiʿ. *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London ; Sterling, Va: Pluto Press, 2004).
320 Sharabi, "Cultural Critics of Contemporary Arab Society."
321 Ṭarābīshī, "Qisatī Maʿ Al-ʿAfīf Al-Akhdar."

began writing to their Western Leftists colleagues, finding more common ground in Third World literature than addressing Arab affairs. Ignoring daily and Arab cultural problems whited the appeal of authenticity. At once works that incorporated familiar cultural references like the Turāth literature was almost irresistible among ordinary Arab readers, especially under the climate of the defeat that arose following the devastating 1967 war. A new set of cultural and literary tastes began emerging in this decade. Though the deviation from the literary norms was slow, the accumulated effects of these changes gave way to a dramatic shift by the beginning of the 1980s. The Arab Left had not only seen its ranks shrink, but also the numbers of its publication slashed from 2000 copies per publication to only 1000. In the late 1970s, notice Bū ʿAlī Yāssin, an avid Arab Leftist, most of the publishing houses of the Arab Left began losing their readership.[322] More and more readers felt alienated by the writing on the Vietnamese guerilla war, Soviet labor Unions, social classes and Marxist theories. The writing on more authentic issue like the Turāth grew more appealing the more the works of the Arab Left estranged their readership. The Turāth was also increasingly seen as a secure heaven during times of accelerated change, with the unprecedented movement of populations from the country to towns intensified.

Minor changes in literary tastes triggered by restrictive laws on free thinking took their toll on the Arab Left. Though Arab regimes has successfully muted the roaring Arab Left, dispersing their major thinkers around the world, these intellectuals were able to regroup themselves in diaspora during the last decade of the century. The first step they took to unmute the moratorium Arab regimes forced on them was to ask uneasy questions about the Turāth.

Embracing the Turāth

Very few events in contemporary Arab thought, so vital to the understanding of the continuities and shifts within the Arab intellectual community, has been as baffling as the re-appearance of the Turāth among the Arab Left. In fact, among those who try to unpack the topic, the return of the Turāth meant to reaffirm yet again the ubiquitous rise of Islam. The reduction of the Turāth to Islam has been devastating. This conceptualization has precluded further explorations of the different modes in Arab thought and

[322] Bū ʿAlī Yāsīn, *Ahl al-qalam wa-mā yasṭurūn : al-mashhad al-thaqāfī al-ʿArabī fī nihāyat al-qarn al-ʿishrīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabīyah, 2001).

foreclosed alternative ways to narrativize the current debates now taking place in the Arab world. It is remarkable that the effort to evoke the distant past in the West was seen as an expression of a cultural movement known as Romanticism, while the same act has been called Islam, confusing religion with the past, history, and culture. Naming practices had always plagued the field of Middle Eastern studies.

In the late 1980s, when Ṭarābīshī made his "turn" and delved into writing on the Turāth, leaving behind a corpus of writing on Sartre, Hegel, Freud and Marx, many have wondered at his seemingly incongruent move. How could Ṭarābīshī, whose writings were essential to the dissemination of Western thinking in the Arab world, give up on his original intention and turn to work on the Turāth? Did he cave in to the cultural trends around him? One Arab commentator incredulously remarks, "No one could believe that the Syrian writer and literary critic, who demonstrated early on [in his career] a mature sense of criticism and ingenuity in his theses and developed a new analysis with distinctive tastes, would turn his back- without a return- on all of this literature and delve headlong into the taxonomies and references of the Arab and Islamic *Turāth*."[323]

What seems to have puzzled many as out of step is Ṭarābīshī's "metamorphosis" from a revolutionary writer to a commentator on the Turāth, not to boast about it but to dislocate its meaning. As shown in the previous chapter, Ṭarābīshī was a genuine nationalist, existentialist, Marxist and worked with the *al-Adāb* publishing house to bring Existential literature to Arabic. He then translated classical western philosophical works from Hegel to Marcuse through Simone De Beauvior and Camus while working with Dār al-Ṭaliʿah. It struck many as an inconsistent move to engage with the Turāth, particularly after the astonishing headway he had made with western theories. In an interview with *al-Hayyat* newspaper in 2006, Ṭarābīshī conceded to his readers this:

"I belong to a revolutionary generation, who followed two generations of the *nahḍa*, where we lived in a complete break with the *Turāth*. Our mental structure [thihniya] and thought were all geared toward modern Western ideologies, which [we] turned into sacred books whether [these works were]

[323] Hussain Ben Hamzah, "*Jurj Tarabishi: Qa'id Fi Harb Al-Mi'at 'Amm*," *Al-Akhbar.com*, May 20, 2009, http://al-akhbar.com/node/82403.

Marxist, nationalist, Socialist, or Unionist. We lived an absolute break (*kaṭīʿa kamila)* with the Turāth and viewed it [with disdain] as no more than *yellow* [cheap and unworthy] books."[324]

Ṭarābīshī's mention of the idea of a "complete break" twice in this testimony suggests that the change in cultural tastes and intellectual debates are dramatic. The previous consensus about the Turāth as a static, moribund tradition, from which all intellectuals had to struggle to free themselves began to crumble at the beginning of 1970s. This obsolete attitude began to give way to a new and revised position as the idea of *Thawra* began to fade away and the idea of Turāth loomed larger. Ṭarābīshī continued that "all the defeats and the disillusionments" with the revolutionary regimes have obligated him to revise his "attitude towards the cultural Turāth."[325] In 1998, in yet another interview, Ṭarābīshī recognized the indispensability of confronting the Turāth. The need to encounter the Turāth, Ṭarābīshī maintained, arises from a widespread realization among writers and scholars that "no revolution, nor any change would enable us to enter the modern age (dukhūl al-ʿaṣr) without inexorably relating it to the critique of the Turāth."[326] Meaning, as long as Arab intellectuals are not done with the Turāth, it is unlikely that any serious change would see the light.

Ṭarābīshī's turn toward investigating the Turāth marked not only a watershed in his personal life, but also a significant conjuncture in the annals of contemporary Arab thought. The *Iʿādat Iktishāf al-Turāth* or "the rediscovery of the Turāth," naturally offers a name to a new era in Arab thought. Coming to discover the Turāth in Paris, Ṭarābīshī wrote in 2006 that "I found the *Turāth* an alternative to the watan [homeland] I left behind." Yet, it is remarkable that Ṭarābīshī conceived the Turāth as an unmistakable threat, which might unravel all the intellectual effort put forth by generations of Arab intellectuals since the *nahḍa*. His embrace of the Turāth was only the first step in his intent to dismantle, disrupt and disqualify it as a model for living in the modern Arab world.

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[324] Ibrahim El-Ariss, "Hiwar Ma' Tarabishi," *Al-Hayyat*, January 30, 2006.
[325] One must note that secular Arabs refuse to equalize Turath with Islam but they talk about al-Turath al-Thaqqafi or *cultural Turath*. In Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Al-Turāth Wa-Al-Tajdīd: Mawqifunā Min Al-Turāth Al-Qadīm*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (al-Qāhirah: al-Markaz al-ʿArabī lil-Baḥth wa-al-Nashr, 1980), 23–24. "religion is part of the Turath, but the Turath is not part of religion."
[326] Zakariyya Jawad, "Interview with Tarabishi," *AL-Arabi*, n.d.

A new approach to the Turāth

Historicizing the Turāth by revealing the social, cultural and political conditions that played into its framing and formulation became a common pursuit among post-1970 Arab Left writers. Widespread among this generation, this historicization nonetheless set their reading of the Turāth apart from past generations. Exposing the human conditions and cultural milieu in which the Turāth took shape was one of the culturally riskiest paths Arab intellectuals were willing to take. Historicizing meant stripping the Turāth of the sacred aura it enjoyed. When Sudanese writer Muhammad Mahmud Tāhā took the first step toward historicizing the Turāth, he paid with his life. Tāhā is probably the first and only victim worldwide to pay with his life for the sake of historicism. For many Arab scholars like Tāhā however, historicizing the Turāth meant the exclusion of God from the making of history or the Turāth as it is conceived by contemporary Arabs. Though at the mid-century it was only Arab Marxists who called to demystify Arab history from God's intervention, by the late 1990s this method grew common and soon became the new norm. In the process Tāhā is rarely remembered.

When late comers like Ṭarābīshī entered the field of Turāth, scholars like Hassan Hanafī, Arkoun, Jābirī, Laroui, Naṣr Abu Zayd, and Tāhā Abed al-Raḥman had made extraordinary explorations of the field by ways of historicizing the Turāth, defining its meaning and scope. These scholars were not only proposing a new reading of the Arab Turāth, but also forging a new relation with the Arab past that they called Turāth. If the Arab past was recreated during the late nineteenth-century with Orientalism, as Massad and others aptly demonstrated, this past was remade yet again during the post-colonial era. The genuine writings on the Turāth created new categories, narratives, and visualizations of the past that engendered a new conceptualization of the Arab past unknown to past generations of Arabs. Although these six names were the forerunners in manufacturing a new conceptualization of Arab Turāth unthinkable before the 1970s, they were not alone in this effort. This period saw the arrival of scholars whose writings problematized the common Qur'ānic interpretations, calling into question the way God's word translated into human language, the reception of the message, and the manner in which the first community of believers had swayed God's word from its original meaning to fit their cultural conditions. Infatuated with this group, Western historiography has in recent years made serious efforts to bring these

voices to English and other western languages. Within this western historiography, however, there is a clear confusion around the question of naming this group; some have called them moderate Islam[327], others Liberal Islam[328], yet others modern Islamic thought.[329] Some have gone as far as calling them secular Islam.[330] Despite the differences in names, many agreed that this group insisted on a different interpretation of the Islamic corpus and the time period in which the Islamic corpus took its final form, calling into question the narrative that endowed the Turāth with an aura of sacredness. Given this crowded field of innovative works, what was left for Ṭarābīshī and his secular critics to contribute?

The quest to historicize the formative period of Islam (between the 610- 1200 CE) offered a fleeting promise to cut the Turāth to its natural size. The idea that historicizing could remove all the myths attached to the Turāth over the course of fourteen hundred years resonated with many Arab intellectuals. Many believed that the Turāth will set to recede and shrink in front of that rigorous method of history. This intellectual method was taken up by moderate Islamists, who also fought to wrest the true meaning of Islam from the hands of extremists. This is the ultimate goal moderate Islamists like Syrian Mohammad Shaḥrur, Tunisian Muhammad Talabi, Moroccan feminist Fatma Marnissi, Egyptian Fahmi Hewaidy, and even Pakistani Fazlurahman and Iranian Soroush set to achieve. What is common to this group, the new speakers of Islam,[331] is the desire to free Arab and Islamic history from the grip of religious predestination.

But the promise to understand the Turāth in its contextual setting paradoxically did not lead to the weakening of its epistemological authority. Instead, many intellectuals ended up asserting its relevance and suitability to current-modern- times. In fact, it became an alternative to European modernity as Ṭarābīshī callously demonstrates. Some have argued that certain aspects of the Turāth are rational and therefore still valid and could be aptly utilized and appropriated in modern times. This assertion to renew the Turāth resonated in the famous writings of Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi who maintained that

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[327] Raymond William Baker, *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).
[328] Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[329] Suha Taji-Farouki, Basheer M. Nafi, and Institute of Ismaili Studies, eds., *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).
[330] Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Co, 2000).
[331] Taji-Farouki and Nafi. *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*.

by leaning more heavily on the Islamic past and the Turāth, new opportunities can open up to confront the challenges that bog down Arab societies.[332]

The conclusion that moderate Islamists reached increasingly unsettled Ṭarābīshī and many secular critics of his circle of the *Arab Rationalist Association*. The application of historical methods to the Turāth guaranteed no way out of past frameworks, but increased the appetite for re-appropriating the Turāth yet again. If western observers and writers have applauded and heralded these works as the new form of liberal, moderate and modern Islam, Ṭarābīshī and many secular critics were apprehended by this type of writings. While starting from progressive positions, Ṭarābīshī argued, these writers ended up taking the same positions conservative Islamists took. Rather than curtailing the arguments extreme Islamic movement, Ṭarābīshī charged, these "moderate Islamists" reinforced the Turāth framework, bringing to the debate a disguised "return" to past epistemologies. For Ṭarābīshī, it seemed impossible that one could rely completely on past frameworks and still be modern. Alas, since historicizing the Turāth did not lead to its logical end but viewed the Turāth as a past with a compelling authority, it was not sufficient to rise to the challenge. If historicizing in the West led inevitably to an epistemological break with the past, in the Arabic-speaking world it revived the appeal of relying on the past. The paradox, for Ṭarābīshī and his colleagues, was not only that historicizing the past functioned in different ways in the West and the Arab world. The absurdity is that the same Arab Marxists who fought to introduce historicity during the late 1950-60s are now fighting against it, in a collective effort to repeal it. The entire project of historicizing was now the subject of criticism for Ṭarābīshī and his colleagues.

Divided Intellectual Community

Ṭarābīshī's first response to the intense debate on the Turāth came as late as 1993, in the form of a short book with the inflammatory title *The Massacre of the Turāth*.[333] In this book Ṭarābīshī created a new taxonomy of four categories in contemporary Arab thoughts on the Turāth, signaling an evident departure in his thoughts and concerns. The old Ṭarābīshī is hardly recognizable in this text. Unlike his

[332] Ḥanafī, *Al-Turāth Wa-Al-Tajdīd*.
[333] Jurj Tarabishi, *Madhbaḥat al-turāth fī al-thaqāfah al-'Arabīyah al-mu'āṣirah* (London, United Kingdom; Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Sāqī, 1993).

previous writings, this work is relatively free of western theories or Marxian jargon. The main concern is not to endorse European ideas, but to stave off the drift toward the Turāth. Ever since Ṭarābīshī published this work, he did not translate a single western work into Arabic, suggesting that his priorities and main concerns had fundamentally changed.

In Paris, Ṭarābīshī worked under the guidance of French-Algerian writer Mohammad Arkoun, who accepted him as a doctoral student. Though Ṭarābīshī never submitted his finished dissertation, which was published into a book in Arabic, Arkoun's ideas swayed him away from his previous ideological thinking, which perceived the Turāth as a dangerous place that he had to avoid. Instead, Arkoun encouraged him to rethink his rigid attitude toward Arab Turāth, cajoling him to view the Turāth as more than Islam or fiqh, the way Islamists in the Middle East viewed it. Arkoun started his career as a historian and was immensely influenced by the Annals School as a student in the late 1960s. The new emphases on social daily practices that downplayed the previous centrality of official narrative and political history appealed to Arkoun. Eager to apply the Annals' approach to non-European spaces, Arkoun was the first native Middle Eastern scholar who sought to write a new history of Arab and Islamic history using the Annals School's apolitical history. In his quest to undermine what he called the "official closed corpus" in the Arab and Islamic historical experience, Arkoun focused on "fringe movements" in Islam to open new horizons for modern-day Muslims to follow.[334] Arkoun's reading of medievalist Islamic philosophers and his reconstruction of a forgotten "humanistic tradition in Islam," prodded many of his Arab students to follow his path by offering an against-the-grain reading of the Turāth. The new exploration of the Turāth, informed by Arkoun's concepts, trickled down to Ṭarābīshī. Thus he began investigating the formative period of Islam by laying bare the ways in which social classes, political feuds, and economic and tribal rivalries played into the forging of the first interpretations of the holy book. Moving away from the mechanical reading of Islamic history, Arkoun taught his students to emphasize contingency in history to examine the manners in which the set of Islamic beliefs came together.[335]

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[334] Mohammed Arkoun and Hāshim Ṣāliḥ, *Qaḍāyā fī naqd al-ʿaql al-dīnī kayfa nafham al-islām al-yawm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 2004).

[335] Susanne Olsson, *Alternative Islamic Discourses and Religious Authority*, ed. Carool Kersten, New edition (Routledge, 2016).

Taking his cue from Arkoun, Ṭarābīshī could no longer afford flouting the heated intellectual debates around the Turāth. By emphasizing the evils of the Turāth, Ṭarābīshī directed the best part of his first work to critiquing contemporary intellectuals who produced a skewed interpretation of the Turāth. Ṭarābīshī conceived the cultural turn toward the Turāth with apprehension, using the metaphor *Irtidād*- backsliding, stepping backward toward past times- to describe the new intellectual trend. Though he never fell short of providing historical evidence of the adverse effect of the Turāth on the lives of modern Arab citizens, in *The Massacre of the Turāth* he convincingly shows the ways in which Arab intellectuals failed to stand up to their initial- more advanced- positions.

"Even if the subject of *judhūr* (roots, ancestors, or heritage) is a common theme among many nations, it has a particular bearing to contemporary Arab world," Ṭarābīshī writes in the opening of his book. Since the defeat in 1967, Arab intellectuals have taken refuge in the Turāth and along the way have turned it into their main ideology, argued Ṭarābīshī. "Educated Arabs lost their control over reality, so they looked for a discourse through which to control…and they found the discourse of the Turāth." Ṭarābīshī contends that Arab intellectuals have projected their preconceptions and biases onto the Turāth and, as a result, have offered ideological readings of the Turāth –with little regard to historical truths. Ṭarābīshī deployed two ideas in his analysis of the current readings of the Turāth: *izāḥah* (dislocation) and *istibdāl* (transference). Whether contemporary Arab readers unconsciously fell prey to psychological transference or dislocation, they have made the Turāth into an "absolute ideology" that naturally bred only "absolute truths."[336]

Ṭarābīshī criticizes four streams of thought in contemporary Arab thought (Marxist school, nationalist school, Islamic Left school, and the Epistemological school). Addressing each school of thought, he proposes an analysis that runs deep into the mental mechanism that guides these readings, raising questions on the assumptions that guide their thinking and the frameworks that sustain their analysis. To provide an example of his analysis of the Marxist school, Ṭarābīshī argues that Arab Marxists

[336] Jurj Ṭarābīshī, *Madhbaḥat al-turāth fī al-thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah al-muʿāṣirah* (London, United Kingdom; Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Sāqī, 1993), 11–16. Here Ṭarābīshī refers to Mohammad Arkoun's call to read the Turath by using the historical method not by emphasizing aspects and overlooking others.

were inherently eclectic and unsystematic in their reading of the Turāth. They are not interested in understanding the historical truth of the Turāth but in choosing the elements that fit into their preconceived 'ideological' visions. The problem with this instrumental reading of the Turāth, Ṭarābīshī asserts, is that this selective use of the Turāth is contrary to their claim of an "objective and scientific reading of the past."

"Arab Marxists, whose enemies had always dismissed them as Turāth-nihilists, responded by reviving the Turāth following Lenin: insisting that the Turāth is not a homogenous unity that is either taken or thrown away. The Turāth is a conflicting field…one part of which can be taken to confront the other part."[337]

This bifurcation of the Turāth seemed to have not bothered Arab Marxists, Ṭarābīshī concludes. This fragmentation of the Turāth impedes any attempt to go beyond the Turāth.

Ṭarābīshī resorts again to a thesis he developed in 1989 that defines the contemporary Arab age as an era inhabited by a Narcissistic wound,[338] an idea he attributed to the psychological blow of the defeat in 1967. The cultural defeat in 1967 "left open a bleeding narcissistic wound"[339] that set in motion a cultural trend of looking back to find better models for present-day ills. He refers to this trend derisively as a "cultural recoil," or *nukūṣ*, at the end of which Arabs were led to re-adopt medieval norms, values, and codes. This glide toward the "imagined medieval past," or the revival of the Turāth, is what Ṭarābīshī accounts for in his dissertation *Arab Intellectuals and The Turāth*. This book unfolds as a gentle parable of how an entire world goes astray because of a defeat. Reading Ṭarābīshī's psychoanalysis of Arab intellectuals is to be immersed in an experience of plunge, the experience of fall. In this dense work, crammed with psychoanalytical jargon, Ṭarābīshī offers an example of how readily human beings fall prey to their own language and their hypothesis. Ṭarābīshī leans heavily on Freud's notion of "collective neuroses" to elaborate on the trends that led up to the reawakening of the medieval past. Ṭarābīshī shows how a great swathe of Arab intelligentsia were taken by that imagined "glorious past". This happened not

[337] Ṭarābīshī. *Turāth*. P. 12.
[338] Ibid. p. 33.
[339] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn Al-ʿArab Wa-Al-Turāth: Al-Taḥlīl Al-Nafsī Li-ʿiṣābin Jamāʿī* (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 1991).

by an accident. As far as Ṭarābīshī is concerned, Arab intellectuals are inflected by a "collective neuroses" (ʿusāb jamaʿī)– namely man's inability to free himself from the past's grip and from history's burden. Ṭarābīshī vividly shows that the complex of the "collective neurosis" was embodied by the fixation on the Turāth in order to encounter the "narcissistic wounds" the present inflicts on Arabic-speakers. This wound resists healing and recovery because Arab intelligentsia continues to compare current modern era with a presumably 'glorious past'.

Ṭarābīshī argues that Egyptian writer Mohammad ʿAmārah, has idealized the Turāth as rational, humanistic, consensual among contemporary Arab peoples and applicable to present day life. This romanticizing of the Turāth, which Ṭarābīshī refers to as a psychological projection, not only makes of the Turāth what it is not, but also deepens the narcissistic wound. Rather than alleviating the pains of the present, the comparison between the glorious past and debased present accelerates the feeling of impotence and disability, writes Ṭarābīshī.[340] This, Ṭarābīshī continues, only perpetuates the unmitigated sense of "a feeling of inferiority," and explains why Arab intellectuals are returning to the Turāth. But in their return to the Turāth they do not make up for their dejected and incomprehensible realities but indeed amplify their low self-esteem.

The main idea that seems to have concerned Ṭarābīshī is what he called the "fragmentation (*tamzīq*) of the Turāth." In all of his critical accounts of these schools and individual scholars, Ṭarābīshī concludes that Arab scholars have failed to grasp the Turāth on its own terms and still less within its holistic historical meaning. They borrowed certain aspects and neglected others in their reading of the Turāth. With this conclusion, Ṭarābīshī demonstrates the long way Arab intellectuals had gone through: from revolutionary stage to a traditional time.

Secularizing the Turāth

One of the questions that has bedeviled many of Ṭarābīshī's followers was his article on secularism in Islam. In an article entitled "the Secular Seeds in Islam,"[341] Ṭarābīshī expressed his revolt against Arab and non-Arab scholars, naming, among others, Bernard Lewis, who had falsely argued that Islam has

340 Ṭarābīshī. *Madhbaḥat al-turāth fī al-thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah al-muʿāṣirah*, 33–34.
341 Ṭarābīshī, "Buthūr al-Almaniyya fi al-Islām." in *Harṭaqāt*.

never differentiated between the spiritual and temporal domains. Countering this ill-conceived idea, Ṭarābīshī suggested that by looking at daily historical experience, "Islam does not completely diverge from Christianity in separating between the here and now and the hereafter."[342] Bringing together moderate Islamists who categorically denounced secularism with western scholars who denied secularism as an available condition within the Islamic historical space, Ṭarābīshī's article debunks all the erroneous readings of Islamic experience as practiced throughout history. "Whenever the dialectics of the sacred and profane played out under Islam, the second prevailed," asserted Ṭarābīshī. "The state masked itself in Islam while its true face was invariably Jāhilī [un-Islamic]."[343]

No other Arab scholar went as far as Ṭarābīshī to entrench (Ta'ṣīl) the secular notion in Islamic historical experience. "Ṭarābīshī wished his project not only to stave off a fading idea [secularism], but primarily to establish a forgotten genealogy [of the secular] in past Arab-Islamic historical experience."[344] Namely, Ṭarābīshī was the first to exhume the word "'ālmaniyya," i.e. secularism in Arabic, from a book written in the tenth century, which he'd encountered by accident. *Miṣbaḥ al ʿaql* (Reason's Light) was written by a Christian Arab author in Egypt named Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ al-Maṣrrī. The discovery of this word overwhelmed Ṭarābīshī: "my focus was to explore the [roots of the] word secularism [to give evidence that] it was not imported from the West as we have been charged. Others have charged secularism [of being] a western word. Secularism is an essential part of our heritage as it existed in the core of the Turāth. Here is the place to point out that Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ al-Maṣrrī of the fourth century [tenth century AD] used this word without expounding on it in his *Miṣbaḥ al ʿaql*, which means that it was a familiar [concept]. Secularism, for Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ al- Maṣrrī, meant 'he who is not a priest,' namely whoever is not a religious man."[345]

For Ṭarābīshī, this was a conclusive verdict that Arabic employed the secular idea even before this idea emerged in the West. With this revelation, Ṭarābīshī argued, Arab thought was poised to break

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[342] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Harṭaqāt I*. Beirut: Rābiṭat al-'Aqlānīyīn al-'Arab ; Dār al-Sāqī, 2006), 21.
[343] Ṭarābīshī, 29.
[344] Hadi Yahmid, "Jurj Tarabishi: Al-'Ilmaniyya Matlab Islami," *Islamonline*, June 2, 2008, http://www.arabphilosophers.com/Arabic/aphilosophers/acontemporary/acontemporary-names/Tarabishi/D_Islamonline.htm.
[345] Ṭarābīshī, *Harṭaqāt*; Yahmid, "Jurj Tarabishi: Al-'Ilmaniyya Matlab Islami."

through the misguided and false duality of Turāth versus contemporaneity. For this unveiling of the secular idea undercuts the claim of those conservatives (the guardians of Turāth) who renounced secularism as a foreign idea that has failed to adapt to the Arab soil or that Arab historical experience is not conducive to secularism. Unearthing the idea of secularism in the Arab land, Ṭarābīshī concluded, should help to "lubricate its assimilation," transforming it from a malicious term to a palatable notion easy to embrace.

Establishing a forgotten historical genealogy of secularism in the Turāth entails sorting out the constellation of social agents, historical processes, and cultural trends that played into deifying the Turāth. To untangle this history, he continued writing on the way Arab and Islamic Turāth was constructed and narrated. Three concluding theses merit some further exploration to capture Ṭarābīshī's thinking: first, his revision of the idea of miracles in Islamic history. Second, constructing the ways in which Muslim scholars (ulama) had elevated the Hadith (Mohammad deeds) to equal the Qur'ān. Third, demonstrating the ways in which the demand for democracy in the contemporary Arab world has been used to cancel out the demand for secularism by modern Arab writers. The rest of this chapter address these issues separately.

Miracles in Islam: Critiquing Moderate Islam

In a time that he felt most isolated from the Arab world, Ṭarābīshī was carried away by the Turāth. His fascination with the Turāth literature was insatiable. He dedicated little time to contemporary politics and had very little to say about the current tumultuous events unfolding in the Middle East. One of his critics wondered "how could Ṭarābīshī write 3000 pages against medieval Sunni Islam and no more than two pages on the 250,000 Syrian mortalities?"[346] Ṭarābīshī's critics made little effort to hide their sheer contempt toward Arab intellectuals who clustered around him for steering clear of politics. Yāssin Ḥāj Ṣāliḥ, one of the prominent detractors of Ṭarābīshī, hacked him for being loyal to the regime in Syria, accusing intellectuals like Ṭarābīshī of afflicting Arab Left in Syria with its weakness scourge.[347] Al-Sayyid wrote, "I have known no other intellectuals who let their people down as much as Arab intellectuals."[348]

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[346] Radwan Sayyid, "Limadha Hamaltu ʿAla Al-ʿAqallaniyyin Al-ʿArab," *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, May 3, 2014.
[347] Yāsīn Ḥājj Ṣāliḥ. *Al-Thaqāfah Ka-Siyāsah: Al-Muthaqqafūn Wa-Mas'ūlīyatuhum Al-Ijtimāʿīyah Fī Zaman Al-Ghīlān*. al-Ṭabʿah al-ūlá (Beirut: al-Muʿassasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 2016).
[348] Sayyid, "Limadha Hamaltu ʿAla Al-ʿAqallaniyyin Al-ʿArab."

Indeed, Ṭarābīshī had never stood out as a political analyst anyway. One of his close friends, a member of the *Arab Rationalist Association* contrasted Ṭarābīshī's "political mediocrity" with his aptitude in "textual analysis."[349] In fact, Ṭarābīshī went out of his way to evade criticizing Asad's regimes before and after 2011. For Ṭarābīshī, however, the entire intellectual endeavor in which he had been engaged is not free from political repercussions. For Ṭarābīshī the existential threat to current Arab order comes not from the Baʿthist regime but Islamism. In this way, Ṭarābīshī relocated the challenge of political Islam to texts, sorting out their political capacity, while endowing his textual analysis with cultural and political consequences. Changes in the conceptualization of these texts, Ṭarābīshī wished to prove, would generate a ripple effect in the political sphere. With this assumption, he addressed Mohammad's status in the Islamic imagination. In *Miracle and the Eclipse of Reason in Islam*, Ṭarābīshī argued that among all religions' founders, Mohammad stood out in owning up to no miracle but the writing of the Qurʾān. Remarkably, Ṭarābīshī argued, the Holy Book denies Mohammad the status of a prophet (nabī) while insisted on calling him messenger (rasūl). Mohammad was sent with the clear mission to spread the word of God, the lawgiver. "Shorn off any capacity to issue laws," Mohammad's image in the Qurʾān was reinforced time and again as "no more than a messenger," depriving him of any authority to legislate, still less to express any opinion or command related to the hereafter. In a manner distinctive only to classical orientalists and atypical of his writing from the 1970's, Ṭarābīshī provided numerous verses from the Qurʾān in which God addresses Mohammad as his messenger, not only divested of any power to express his opinion but also chastised for uttering "decrees" and "verdicts" out of his mind. Overwhelming his reader with citations of numerous Qurʾānic verses, Ṭarābīshī not only enshrines the entire discussion with evidence that speaks voluminously to Muslims, but he also leaves the reader humbled and disenchanted with the "truncated standing of Mohammad." All the holiness that once shrouded Mohammad slipped away as his human condition burst forth.

After establishing that Mohammad was not a prophet in the Holy Book but a mere messenger, Ṭarābīshī finds an unbridgeable disparity between this Qurʾānic portrayal and the ever-growing Hadith

[349] Al-ʿAfif Al-Akhdar: Raddi ʿAla Qisat Al-Tarabishi Maʿi.," *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=369116.

literature that refers to Mohammad as "the last prophet." The Hadith, a collection of Mohammad's sayings and deeds, not only explicitly contradicts the spirit of the Holy Book, but also confers on Mohammad the legal authority and political clout that the Qur'ān explicitly denies him. By revealing that the Hadith is at odd with the Qur'ān, rather than completing it, Ṭarābīshī provided a unique occasion to inveigh the authenticity of the Hadith, facilitating the first point of entry for secularizing the sacred texts.[350]

This method that sought to bring to fore the contradictions and disparities between the Qur'ān and the Sunna, was and remained the most effective strategy embraced by the *Arab Rationalist Association (*see chapter 5*)* to make inroads for rational and secular thinking in contemporary Arab thought. Effecting small shocks in the mythical "belief system," overwhelming devout Muslims with more nuanced and subtle understandings of Islamic belief, and digging up the earthly aspects in Mohammad's ordinary life, were among the "rationalist strategies" to secularize the Turāth. Secularism, as far as Ṭarābīshī is concerned, is a new understanding of the past to set free Arab subjects of the traumatic grasp of the 1967. Secularism is to go beyond the mainstream: to defy, to embarrass, to criticize, and to shock the Arab subject so that he could re-order his relation with the Turāth. Secularism is not a revolution; it is a transgression, a way of seeing the world through a demythologized lens.

Qur'an versus Hadith

Ṭarābīshī further defies the way the Turāth was commonly conceived in his most recent work *From Islam of the Qur'ān to the Islam of the Hadith*. In this book Ṭarābīshī tells how the Sunna literature that began to develop around the figure of Mohammad hijacked the Qur'ān and tweaked its meaning from its original aim. In over 600 pages, which Ṭarābīshī viewed as the peak of his entire productive career, he accounts for a lengthy but steady process in which ensuing generations of Muslims ʿulama eroded the edge the Qur'ān had over the Hadith, reaching the 13th century when many Muslims began subscribing equal value to the Hadith compendium as that of the Qur'ān. It is a florid narrative of how the downgrading of the Qur'ān took place through the deification of the Hadith. Intertwined with this effort is the way in which the Hadith literature was relocated from the temporal to the sacred domain. Once consecrated, the Hadith

[350] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. *Al-Muʿjizah, aw, Subāt al-ʿaql fī al-Islām*. Beirut : Rābiṭat al-ʿAqlānīyīn al-ʿArab : Dār al-Sāqī, 2008).

was given equal status with the Qurʾān. It was al-Shafiʿī, the pre-eminent jurist of the ninth century, with whom this process reached its zenith. Al-Shafiʿī, Ṭarābīshī demonstrates, oversaw this pairing between the Qurʾān and the Hadith.

In *From Islam of the Qurʾān to Islam of the Hadith* Ṭarābīshī focuses his criticism on moderate Islamists rather than extreme Islamic movements. The tendency to subject moderate Islam to scathing criticism emanates from Ṭarābīshī's belief that Islamists' sway on politics and culture cannot be diminished or dismissed, since their piety branches out into politics. The old divergence between Qurʾān and Hadith are being erased so that religious people intervene in politics, argues Ṭarābīshī. To understand the bind in which Islamists have placed Arab societies, it is useful to start with the specific fears that they are exploiting. Islamists, particularly in the wake of the 1967 war, rebooted the Islamic discourse anew to serve particular needs. They uttered the same old quips with a radicalized tinge to pose themselves the only authentic alternative. According to Ṭarābīshī, Islamists have transformed Islam through a widespread publication network, funding, and an attentive audience, giving rise to a new and unfamiliar mode of Islamic religiosity, unlike the classical Islam in whose name they stock (political) claims. For example, Ṭarābīshī writes that starting in the late 1970s, Islamists changed the tone and the underlying message of their Daʿūa (calling or proselytizing) movement. While before the 1970s, Ṭarābīshī argues, the focus was on the rhetorical miracle of the Qurʾān, after the 1980s the emphasis underscored "the scientific miracle of the Qurʾān." Why did Islamists begin to valorize the scientific elements in the Qurʾān while watering down their previous focus on miracles? To meet the new public demand on science Ṭarābīshī answers. As a British observer maintained, "Since the 1980s, the 'scientific miracle' has become a major tool for Islamic proselytizing and appears to have met with considerable success. It has given Muslims a renewed sense of pride in their religion."[351] Even Arab universities began looking at the Qurʾān as a scientific text that also prophesies research breakthroughs.[352] The hunt for scientific foreknowledge in the Qurʾān

[351] Brian Whitaker, *Arabs Without God*, 1 edition (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 62.

[352] In *Arabs Without God*, British journalist Brian Whitakers writes "The origin of Qurʾanic science can be traced back to a French doctor, Maurice Bucaille, who served as family physician to King Faisal of Saudi Arabia in the early 1970s. Bucaille's book The Bible, The Qurʾan and Science argued "that while the Bible contains many scientific errors, the Qurʾan was remarkably prescient: references to the Big Bang, Black holes and space travel can all be found in its verses. See: Whitaker, 62.

unsettles Ṭarābīshī, and he posts some serious questions regarding Arabs' fetishism of their past, Turāth, and the Qur'ān. For Ṭarābīshī, living in Paris, this inflated sense of pride in the Turāth irrevocably points to a newfound trend of Arab irrationalism.

Ṭarābīshī is mostly bold on moderate Islamists because they are all parlaying to masses based on memory rather than on history. They seem to hold onto beliefs that are very much at odds not only with historical context, but also in variance with modernity, whose basic cultural models do not support their eagerness to adhere to the Turāth. Even when Islamists compulsively bring in medieval Islam, Ṭarābīshī argues, to graft it in modern life, they trim it from its pluralistic component. To counteract these arguments of moderate Islam, which he considers both ahistorical and dangerous, Ṭarābīshī brings in the *nahḍa* and its scholars who called for a different approach to the Turāth. Why *nahḍa* now?

For late twentieth-century Arab Leftists like Ṭarābīshī, who learned about the post-colonial condition the hard way, the *nahḍa* marked a new beginning, a period in which Arabs confronted their Turāth for the first time and reevaluated their concepts of traditions. In one of the most compelling accounts of the *nahḍawi* figures, Ṭarābīshī showed how the conception of time was re-assessed during the *nahḍa*. Under the conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, moderate Islamists realized that "time has truly changed, and the circumstances of the twentieth century are unlike those of the beginning of Islam."[353] As one historian put it, the concept of a new beginning, which Ṭarābīshī associated with the *nahḍa*, meant "inaugurating something that never existed before. It meant not completing the past but initiating something wholly separate and distinct from it, and hence privileging (at least implicitly) the present over the past, and the immediate over the transmitted."[354] For Ṭarābīshī, the *nahḍa* stands for the concept of a new beginning. Its main figures wrestled with the unfolding realities, not by seeking recourse in the past, but by developing a new perspective on the Turāth.[355] Yet, during the twentieth century, Ṭarābīshī argues, reality is disregarded by psot-colonial writers. Unlike *nahḍawis*, who struggled to

[353] Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. Muḥammad Jamīl Bayhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah 1980), p. 24.
[354] David Gross, *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and the Critique of Modernity*, Critical Perspectives on Modern Culture (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 26–27.
[355] Ṭarābīshī, *Min Al-Nahḍah Ilá Al-Riddah*. See Chapter I on Qāssim Amīn whose conception and worldview fundamentally transformed in a matter of two years, from a defender of Arab traditions to a harsh critic of Arab culture.

"cultivate the new in order to authorize the present in an entirely different way than it had been authorized in the past,"[356] post-colonial Arab intellectuals, haunted by the trauma of the defeat, firmly adhered to restoring a long-gone Turāth. In particular, Ṭarābīshī questions the assumptions, biases, and frames that define the way of the current Islāhi (reform) Islam movements. For these moderate Islamists, Ṭarābīshī argues, the question is not whether or not times have changed, but whether "this change is deep enough to entail the replacement of the Shariʿa."[357] This gap between *nahḍawi* and current Islamic scholars illustrates the change among moderate Islamists. While *nahḍawis* acknowledged the deep changes that forced fundamental adaptations to their understanding of the sacred texts, "the community of current Muslim jurists claimed that the modification of the manifested decrees in the Qurʾān and Hadiths are illegal except with necessity;" Here, Ṭarābīshī is quick to ask "does this necessity exist?" Ṭarābīshī argues that present moderate Islamists are in the grasp of the "certainties of the text". The fact that they no longer acknowledge the "necessity" to make amendments in the Shariʿa text, marks a regression and a backsliding to an unwanted past. This means that they are denying reality and are less moderate than they appear to be.[358]

Democracy and Secularism

Ṭarābīshī's new understanding that by making small shocks in belief systems, writers could afford to bring about change to society began taking precedence over his older strategy. Previously, Ṭarābīshī thought that it is enough to expose readers to newly translated western ideas to bring about change. This is the same assumption that guided him in his writing on democracy in the Arab world. Arab intellectuals' unwavering calls for, and insistence on, democracy provided Ṭarābīshī with the occasion to criticize them for calling for democracy in politics but rejecting it in other aspects of life, not least of all in religious affairs, sexuality, and free thinking. "Do we accept an Arab Luther?" Ṭarābīshī asked Arab intellectuals who ascribed to Arab regimes all the ills in Arab societies while vindicating Arab cultural system, its

[356] Gross, *The Past in Ruins*, 28.
[357] Ṭarābīshī. Bayyuhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*.
[358] For a critical assessment of Ṭarābīshī's ideas which conceives the Shariʿa as a humanly text like any text subject to all "western" methods of textual analysis and hermeneutics see: Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (March 20, 2006): 323–47; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005).

values and morals. One of the most cited lines Ṭarābīshī ever inscribed was "while contemporary Arab peoples are craving democracy in politics, they reject it in religion."[359] For Ṭarābīshī, the appeal of and the consensus around the "democratic demand" *al-Maṭlab al-Dīmocrraṭṭī* among Arab intellectuals had to stir suspicion. The unifying demand of moderate Islamists, socialists, post-Marxists, and nationalists to introduce democracy apprehended Ṭarābīshī. Though he hailed "democracy as the best political order and the most rational" that the "human mind could have ever reached," he had some misgivings toward the democratic model that is cut off from the concomitant "culture of democracy."[360]

Ṭarābīshī argued that the current insistence on democracy cloaked an aversion towards secularism. For Ṭarābīshī, secularism is part and parcel of what he calls the "culture of democracy." The two cannot be separated except arbitrarily and capriciously. Therefore, Arab intellectuals' demand for democracy underscores mechanical democracy (or procedural democracy) while explicitly rejecting the culture of democracy. Chafing against this reduced sense of democracy, he writes:

"Democracy is a plant in need of great care, attention and protection so that it can develop one day from a small shrub to a fruitful tree. Today's biggest illusion is the notion that we can hold an election and that's all. This idea is rather discouraging, as the idea of Arab Unity or Arab socialism previously proved to be. There is no magic solution. All solutions must be historical; history does not advance in leaps but rather slowly. If that progress piles up, it could accumulate into a revolution, but not in one night. Thus, I'm democrat but a delayed one, I call myself a 'democratic project', I'm not a democrat because democracy is not a ready-made fruit in Arab societies."[361]

The Tide toward the Nahda

By remorselessly advocating for a culture of democracy over mechanical democracy, Ṭarābīshī risks being charged with a culturist approach. Indeed, his countryman Burhān Ghalyūn, a political scientist at the Sorbonne University in Paris, was among the first to argue that Ṭarābīshī attributed the challenges and problems currently facing Arab societies into cultural characteristics rather than political

[359] Ṭarābīshī, *Harṭaqāt*.
[360] Ṭarābīshī. "Fi Thaqafat al-Dimūqratiya,". Chapters 1, 2.
[361] Ṭarābīshī "Anā Usamī Nasfi Mashruʿan Democraṭiyyan.'"

conditions.[362] For Ṭarābīshī, as for most of his associates in the *Arab Rationalist Association*, however, the consistent instability of Arab states stems from historical data, namely, a recorded textuality and collective memory that forbids Arab populations from assimilating and adopting modern capacities smoothly. To counter the "culturalist" allegation, Ṭarābīshī embraces the culturist attitude that prevailed in the writing of the *nahḍa* period. For Ṭarābīshī the principal mindset that defined the *nahḍa* was most obvious in its intellectuals' propensity to accept the other (West), their eagerness to revise their history, and their aptitude to acknowledge that something was wrong. This willingness and capacity to open up to new models can be found in one of the reformers of the late nineteenth-century who believed that "There is no second civilization, civilization means European civilization."[363] Reviving the cultural discourse, therefore, was not alien to Arab intellectuals.

Ṭarābīshī's attitude towards nineteenth-century *nahḍa* was ambiguous until the beginning of the 1980s, and contained a defensive streak. Earlier *nahḍawi* reformists, he claimed, took an earnest look at the sacred text and tried to reconcile it with modernity. They inherently viewed Islam as amenable to modernity. A reconciliation between the two was possible. Current Islamic figures, however, are unlike the *nahḍawi* reformers. They reject modernity in the name of Islam.

In 1980, he wrote that though Arab feminists of the *nahḍa*, such as Qāssim Amīn, Jamīl Bayhum and others, supported more rights to women, they eventually fall short of providing a more compelling ground for their arguments. Nineteenth century "Arab feminists evaded critiquing religion," he complained, since they "searched in religion itself" for verses that "support their arguments to legitimize women rights."[364] Ṭarābīshī's criticism of the *nahḍa* pioneers was not restricted to issue of women's rights, however. He rails against their constrained epistemological scope. He writes that the pioneers of the *nahḍa* did not differentiate between social and natural conditions. For the most part, they took what is socially constructed as natural and vice versa. They considered the subordinate status of women as natural, God-given order or simply a natural way of life. Citing Jamīl Bayyham, Ṭarābīshī explains that for these

[362] Ghalyūn and Ziyādah, *Al-ʿArab Wa-Taḥawwulāt Al-ʿālam Min Suqūṭ Jidār Birlīn Ilá Suqūṭ Baghdād*.
[363] Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1994), 25.
[364] Jamīl Bayhum. *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Tali'ah. p. 14.

scholars, "what generated from social conditions was attributed to natural order." They failed to see that "the gap between men and women was engraved in society, rather than in nature, but it was viewed as if this gap were inscribed in nature not society, to justify its continuity in the name of natural instinct."[365] Muḥammad Jamīl Bayhum, one of the advocates of women's rights in the *nahḍa*,[366] writes that "social orders are the result of laws of nature… any attempt that aims at disrupting it by replacing the social order, according to individuals' desire, is damaging and considered against natural laws."[367]

This essential shortsightedness of the *nahḍawi* scholars is forgiven, given the intellectual space and time of these writings. The nineteenth-century took what is social to be natural, a view which wasn't particular to the Arab intellectuals. As Joan Scott has shown recently, the idea of nature was essential in nineteenth-century thought regarding to "women, cultural hierarchies, and social ordering. In the discourse of secularism, the existence of separate spheres for women and men was no longer attributed to God, it was taken as a natural fact. The insistence on nature's mandate was a distinctive aspect of nineteenth-century secularism. Human biology was the ultimate source of the unequal and distinctive roles for women and men."[368]

Bayhum, who failed to see women as independent subjects, was credited by Ṭarābīshī for his eagerness to learn from the West. In the first line of the introduction of *Women in Modernity*, published in 1927, Bayhum writes: "The East today exists in a learning and developing [stage], and his teacher is the West."[369] Commenting on this idea, Ṭarābīshī explains, "Contrary to subsequent generations of the post-colonial era, who desired to assert their identity not through taking from the West but against it, "Jamīl Bayyham did not feel uncomfortable asserting the imperative and indispensability of teaching the East at the hands of the West."[370] If until 1980 Ṭarābīshī related to the *nahḍa* cautiously, in the subsequent years he embraced its spirit against a growing public demand to go against the West and modernity in the

[365] Bayyuhum, 12.
[366] Fruma Zachs, "Muḥammad Jamīl Bayhum and the Woman Question," *Die Welt Des Islams* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 50–75, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700607-0003A0003.
[367] Bayyuhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*, 10.
[368] Joan Wallach Scott. *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), 60.
[369] Bayyuhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*, 39.
[370] Bayyuhum, *Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Islām Wa-Fī Al-ḥaḍārah Al-Gharbīyah*. P.39-41

name of cultural authenticity and the Turāth. Taking his cues from *nahḍawais*, who demonstrated a rational mind unencumbered by the dead hand of the Turāth, Ṭarābīshī wondered how the Turāth at the end of the twentieth-century became increasingly prescriptive, when the hold of Turāth had lost its cohesive force in previous generations. For Ṭarābīshī, the *nahḍa*- providing a new beginning- was the only antidote to the recent Turāth fetishism in the Arab world.

Conclusion:

This chapter demonstrates that Arab Left intellectuals (re)turned to study the Turāth in the same way that other nations' intellectuals turned to the study of their own pasts. In the context of the Middle East, however, this turn was misconceived and narrated as a return to Islam. Though the return of the Turāth consisted, among other things, a new discovery of Islam, it was by no means reducible to Islam only. The intellectual career of Ṭarābīshī complicates this assumption, while elaborating on the ways in which the Arab Left regrouped in the late 1990s around anti-Turāth agenda, calling into question another assumption in current historiography, according to which the Arab Left has vanished into thin air.

This chapter accounted for the undoing of the revolutionary Ṭarābīshī and the emergence of the neo- *nahḍawi* Ṭarābīshī in his place. Nothing captures Ṭarābīshī's passage from utopia to dystopia as the transition from *thawrah* to *nahḍa* and his urge to renew the positions and cultural attitudes valorized by nineteenth century intellectuals. By asking why retrieving the spirit of the *nahḍa* in the late 20th became an urgent imperative for Ṭarābīshī, this chapter offers a historical explanation for this shift: it resulted from the dispersion of the Arab Left during the 1970s, encouraged by post-colonial state's policies, the ensuing emergence of Turāth, and the realization of many Arab Leftists of the undead past that continue to shape ideas and mindsets in current political and intellectual debates. This chapter goes beyond Ṭarābīshī's engagement with Leftist frameworks (most prominently Marxism and socialism, pan-Arabism) that opened new possibilities before Arab intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s. Instead it emphasizes the ways in which Ṭarābīshī ended up owning up to the *nahḍa* frameworks after years of overlooking it. If there is a new Ṭarābīshī that looms large in these years, it was one who emphasized the power of culture in shaping people's desires, behaviors, and morals. The Ṭarābīshī of the 1960s-70s, who

thought of Arab society only through economics and class-analysis, completely excluding the power of culture. His later return to the *nahḍa* reflects and legitimizes this cultural turn in his writings.

CHAPTER V: LAFIF LAKHDAR: REORIENTING THE TURĀTH

This chapter explores the life and thought of Lafif Lakhdar, a Tunisian writer and polymath with a wide range of knowledge, insight and enthusiasm in humanities. Lakhdar's life is rife with ironies. He was the first to promulgate the notion "culture of life," a currently prevalent term he coined in 1990, with the aim of setting secular thinkers aside from Islamist parties, which he dubbed the disseminators of a "culture of death." Yet, a man so keen on promoting the value of life, who resisted the rituals of death and destruction, ended his own on a calm day in June 2013 in the city of Paris. A controversial writer who developed many enemies as well as scores of followers, Lakhdar was found dead on a curb in one of Paris allays. His friends' pleas could not prevent him from committing suicide. A week before taking the "bitter bill" he called an old friend, Syrian Marxist Ṣādiq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm to say farewell. In their telephone call, al-ʿAẓm recalled that Lakhdar said these words "next Wednesday I will end my life." al-ʿAẓm, failing to dissuade his old friend from his decision, attested that "very few words had shivered my bones as Lakhdar's."[371]

This chapter narrates the story of a child who was born into a hovel in rural Tunisia; a child who was destined to become an awe-inspiring intellectual of high caliber. Lakhdar started as a Marxist enthusiast, he traversed the path of many Arab Left intellectuals in the 1960s, yet he was among the first to break with Marxism. Aside from recounting Lakhdar's stormy life, a life replete with radical turnabouts, this chapter makes a foray into the philosophy this astonishingly self-made scholar undertook to disseminate. Lakhdar was far more than a distinguished writer; his thought embodied the rational that guided a small stream of secular Arab Leftists who emerged to the surface only during the 1990s, to combat what they conceived as Turāthism (traditionalism). Nonetheless, Lakhdar's thorough analysis of the sorely needed reforms in the Arab world confer on his project a brutal realism that other intellectuals

[371] Interview with al-ʿAẓm. Princeton University, 22 May 2016. Describing Lakhdar as the most courageous Arab intellectual in the last few decades, al-ʿAẓm immensely admired Lakhdar but wondered why he is not remembered, forgotten and overlooked. Though this chapter is about Lakhdar's endeavor to rearticulate a new position toward the Turāth, it simultaneously provides answers to al-ʿAẓm's intriguing questions.

could only wish to replicate. What made Lakhdar's so unique? What were his propositions for renewing Arab culture? How were his visionary ideas received in his home country and elsewhere in the Middle East? Why did the young Marxist end up preaching for secularism? How did he deal with the Turāth?

Lafif Lakhdar led a life marked by extreme poverty, a life defined by ethical lapses that forever seared his mind. At early age, he recognized the yawning disparity between grand narratives and real life practices. The unbridgeable gap between high morals and Islamic ethics on the one hand and the exigencies of daily life (and the necessities) of human needs on the other, shaped Lakhdar's personality and thinking. Economic hardships and social deprivation forced him to deviate from the cultural script, let alone breaching many religious codes and Islamic strictures. Living a life of need and deficiency instilled in him a predisposition to transgression and trespassing to survive and make living. This constant want led him to question the many social convention, tacit rules, and morals that constrained other intellectuals coming from middle class and upper middle class. Lakhdar, as we will explore throughout, set himself to destroy the unspoken consensus and "cultural script" that straddle contemporary Arabic speakers: the burden of history, veneration of the dead, worshipping ancestors. Lakhdar recognizes that even though Arab societies witnessed fundamental changes since the 1960s, there is an entrenched cultural mood that interested in resisting change.

Lakhdar admired nineteenth-century literature for its profound, straightforward, and educational capacities. Like eminent late-*nahḍa* scholars Salama Musa and Taha Hussain, whose books he read avidly but secretly, his writings ring with educational messages. Believing that each one hides his "own story," Lakdar discloses his own to help others follow on his path. Fraught with extraordinary turns, Lakhdar's life not only ended with a suicide, but it features a strange array of paradoxical pursuits. Spending his adulthood without working, Lakhdar was caught in bestiality (sexual intercourse with animals), kicked out of the most prestigious intellectual salons in Beirut, advised Algeria's first prime minister. For Lakhdar, what people repress and hide define their behavior and thinking more than what they reveal and make public. What applies to individuals, he argued, equally applies to cultures and Islamic culture in particular: what remains unthinkable in Arab and Islamic Turāth delimits the way it is memorized,

practiced and lived.[372] For Lakdar exposing the untold and repressed stories that current Islamic interpretations systematically marginalize invalidates the much of the knowledge in contemporary Arab societies regarding the Turāth. Lakhdar, for instance, asks why very few readers know that Egyptian eminent writer Tawfik al-Hakim was a queer and peot Al-Ma'ari was a guy? Who would these two best-sellers who have been received? Lakhdar was not interested in sexuality as a theme, but rather to raise questions on the ways cultural hierarchies, boundaries, and frameworks in Arab societies had hardened and taken for granted.

Lakhdar was not searching for truth in history writings. He rather was invested in interrogations of knowledge production. More Knowledge is not about finding truth, given that truth is relational, proportional, and contextual, but knowledge comes into being when the unsayable rendered sayable, when the unthinkable becomes thinkable and accessible. Every story is a valid story so long as it delivered well and speaks to people's rational instincts. In other words, to serve the purpose of knowledge one has not only to think through what is available- the thinkable- but through a serious engagement with the unthinkable. As we will see below, when Lakhdar writes Mohammad's biography, he essentially writes the overlooked history of Mohammad as growing up child in Mecca.

It is with this conviction that he ties Islamic narratives with the formation of the self, or the formation of subjectivity. Lakhdar concedes that the way Islamic narratives are being told in contemporary Arab societies had a variety of deleterious effects that among other things encumber Arab and Islamic citizens, pressing them into positions and frameworks that make it impossible to integrate in politics of modernity. Rather than conceiving Islamic subjectivity as an "alternative model of subjectivity," Lakhdar addresses it as a problem that demands unpacking. For Lakhdar, conservative social mores, traditionalist reading of sacred texts, and un-nuanced understanding of the sacred within the Arab Turāth, are all looming factors that threaten the entire edifice of a liberal democratic tradition that began to take hold in Arab societies during the late 19th century. It is not Islam as such that is threatening; it is the presumptions, commitments, and affective attachments that the current adherence to "Islamic orthodoxy" that enable and

[372] Lakhdar, like the rest of the Association, were attacked for deploying psychoanalysis conceptions on Arab and Islamic culture. On the debate against Lakhdar, see: Muna Fayyad, Al-Hayyat, January 14, 2001.

sustain a "perplex citizen," which straddle Muslim subjects with an undiminished "sense of guilt," and determines his view of politics as necessarily antagonistic to Islam. [373] Lakhdar believes that there are invisible links between Islamic teachings and strictures and the unbearable guilt feeling, which is crucial for ordering religion in society. In what follows, I elaborate on Lakhdar's intellectual biography before exploring the logic behind his last resort to write Mohammad's biography through which his stand toward the Turāth is articulated.

Biography

Lafif Lakhdar's life gave salience to the inexorable link between poverty and moral lapses. It features how morals are malleable, subjected to human needs. Lakhdar spent the majority of his life in Paris on the margins. His life was a tale of constant struggle after making a living. Still, he produced a half dozen books, numerous reviews and translations, and his articles were published in liberal website like *Elaph, Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin* and *al-Awan*. Though his output is not vast, his writing animated regular debates featured on these highly liberal Arabic websites which competed over publishing his articles. "[D]ozens of other reform-oriented sites," attested a foreign observer of Arab intellectual debates, "republished his articles," that expanded the reach and scope of his ideas. [374]

Lafif Lakhdar was born in a desolate slum town near *Makthar* in northeastern Tunisia in 1934.[375] Situated on a plateau at 900 meters above sea level, *Makthar* affords its inhabitants a gripping pastoral view with a vast grassland. Based on the remains of an old Roman town, it is surrounded by debilitating Roman walls and pagan ritual sites that endowed the slum with an imposing historical aura. The Romans, it is commonly said, established towns and cities about every twenty miles, a day's march for the Roman legions. *Makthar* was such a station for them. The ruins of these Roman communities are still visible throughout the area, decayed and forlorn reminders of better times.

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[373] For a critique of this vision see Saba Mahmood. Mahmood does not see the ways in which orthodox religious sensibilities are incommensurate with secular norms of sociability that Lakhdar insisits upon. ""it would be hard to conclude that orthodox Islamic social mores constitute the greatest threat to the establishment of substantive democracy." Xix Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[374] "Lafif Lakhdar: A European Muslim Reformist," MEMRI - The Middle East Media Research Institute, accessed April 23, 2015, http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/137/1807.htm.

[375] The place in which he was born remains unnamed. Lafif Lakhdar is the French transcription of the Arabic name ʿAfīf al-Akḥḍar. The change in transcription and pronunciation was consciously made to ease his integration in French society.

Lakhdar's family was never to leave *Makthar's* environs. His father, a mild and inoffensive man, led a dutiful and blameless farming life. His mother, a God-fearing woman, was more energetic when compared with his father's insipid and anemic personality. "A rough and somewhat of a shifty woman" Lakhdar described her in his article "My relations to my Mother is the Key to my Personality." Beside the house chores, she ventured from time to time to help in outdoor farming obligations depending on rain and season. More than anything the family's devotion to a long, undisrupted tradition of farming marked its lifestyle. *Makthar* and its vicinities, like the rest of rural Tunisia, was culturally cut off from the metropolitan centers of the big, coastline cities at the first half of the twentieth-century. This disparity between the Franco-phonic coastline and the rather traditional hinterland reaches back to the days of the French *colon* in Tunisia. Rather than "modernizing" rural towns by eliminating the social and cultural differences between central cities and far off towns, French policies in North Africa sowed a tradition that reinforced this disparity. By encouraging peasants to cultivate their farms, French policy in Tunisia "bind *fellahin* and their families even more closely to farms" without freeing them to "pursue other, often more lucrative enterprises."[376]

Following the prescriptions the *colon* drew for them, Lakhdar family threw its lot on handwork and rustic life. Like many other *fallahin* in *Makthar*, the Lakhdars delicately took care of their livestock. With the advent of the French to Tunisia their dependency on and fidelity to this farming system was amplified for it now perceived as the glue that held them together in times of blight, famine, and deprivation. It was this farming system that helped them survive the years of WWII, which Tunisians like many North Africans, found themselves embroiled in as the European war spilled over to the southern rim of the Mediterranean. When Lafif Lakhdar was born inside a slum, his father was a peasant who worked deferentially for an (Arab!) landowner, but died at a very early age due to poor sanitary conditions when Lafif, the older among seven siblings, was 13-years-old.[377] His father's passing left an enduring mark on

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[376] Mira Zussman, *Development and Disenchantment in Rural Tunisia: The Bourguiba Years* (Boulder: Westview Pr, 1992), 181.

[377] "Raḥīl al-Mufakir al-Tunisī Al-ʿAfīf Al-Akhḍar," *@Elaph.com* accessed March 19, 2015, http://www.elaph.com/Web/opinion/2013/6/820723.html. Ehud Ein-Gil published a lengthy interview with Lakhdar in Paris in 2006, mentions that Lakhdar's "seven of eight brothers and sisters died in childhood." See: "The roots of jihad." Haaretz.org published Mar 16, 2006.

the young Lafif. Being an orphan, he wrote in late 2011, turned him particularly "susceptible to all sorts of taunts and derisions" in rural Tunisia that did not accept fatherless boys. These "mockeries" haunted young Lakhdar while shaping his lifelong taste for rural people. Nonetheless, this *experience* also benefited him in "delving into prophet Mohammad's complex personality that had also been shaped by orphanage experience."[378]

Lakhdar's childhood was not only shaped by his town's pattern of destitution and poverty. He was a "distressed orphan," he reminisces in 2004, "in [constant] rush to find an [alternative] father to identify with."[379] At a very young age he found in his teacher at the *Kutab,* Shaikh ʿAshur, a source of solace and inspiration to compensate for his father's loss. Shaikh ʿAshur would be the first teacher whose ideas impacted Lakhdar's instincts. Hailed from a highly cherished ʿ*ulama* family, steeped in religious studies, Sheikh Fāḍel bin ʿAshur (1909-1970) was a bold reformist, a staunch supporter of pluralistic reading of the *Quran*, and a vehement critic of conservative Islamic practices in Tunisia. His was one of the clear voices at the mid twentieth century to call for *Maqasid* reading of the *Quran*- a reading that emphasized the *purposes (Maqsad* means purpose/intention*)* and spirit of the *Quran* over its literary reading.[380] ʿAshur made his progressive ideas public in his *Literature and Intellectual Movement in Tunisia*. A historical work that furnished a vigorous survey of the variety of Islamic modes in Tunisia, while carving a great portion of the book to extol Tunisian Islamic reformers in the 19th century- a movement directed by Khair al-Dinn, one of the early Tunisian Muslim thinkers to increasingly become concerned with the decline of the Islamic community and the means to regenerate it. Khair al-Dinn's writings and endeavors as an education minister in the late 19th century placed the groundwork for Islamic reforms in his small country.[381] ʿAshur's work, however, not only took inspiration from Khair al-Dinn's, but strived to evaluate the works and lives of Islamic scholars who sustained and reinforced Khair al-Dinn's project to reform

[378] Hassan Bin ʿUthman, "Al-ʿAfīf Al-Akhḍar: ʿAlāqatī Maʿ Ummī Muftāḥ Shakhṣiyyati.," *Alawan.org*, accessed March 18, 2015, http://alawan.org/article8400.html. (My relations to my Mother [offers] the Key for my Personality.)
[379] Hassan Bin ʾuthma.
[380] On the history of the Maqasid method that reaches back to the 13th century, see Mohammad Kamali, "Law and Ethics in Islam-The role of the Maqasid." In ed. Kari vogt. *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition*. I.B. Tauris, 2009.
[381] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

institutions in Tunisia. Though ʿAshur was a progeny of a highly regarded *ulama* family that ardently embraced *Maqasid* and liberal reading of the *Quran*, he nonetheless believed in co-mingling politics and Islam (state and religion) to induce societal change. Lakhdar cites one case that embodied this merging that he was not approved of.

In 1961, premier Habib Bourgibah put ʿAshur into task when he imprudently asked Shaiekh ʿAshur to issue a *fatwa* that authorizes the break of the fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. Fasting seemed to the unencumbered, progressive president to inflict devastating impacts on domestic production that caused a tremendous disservice to the nascent Tunisian economy. ʿAshur was a true reformist but not a revolutionist. He was the chief *mufti* of Tunisia and the Dean of *L'universite Zitouna*, the primary religious school in Tunisia. Yet, no matter how reform oriented he was, he rebuffed the idea as ludicrous and refused to follow through Bourgibah's radical and far reaching reforms. Though he failed Bourgibah's sturdy test, ʿAshur nonetheless remained a reformer, with a solid understanding of the indispensable need of adapting *Quranic* ideas for the wellbeing of Tunisians.

Studying under ʿAshur, young Lafif Lakhdar was qualified to see the nuances within Islam at early age, witnessing the cultural war within Islam, and absorb the *Maqasid* Islam in its name his teacher waged a war against other modes of Islamic practices. His pliable mind effortlessly assimilated Islam in its most liberal mode- an Islam that largely differs from the customary Islam (*Islam taqlidi)* that he inherited from his parent and grandparents. [382] Though Lakhdar could not grasp the intricacies of *Quranic* exegesis at this stage, he was able to weigh the stakes of Islam in politics from his teacher, whose engagement in lengthy debates with other Islamists informed him. Remarkably, Lakhdar embraced the view that his teacher instilled in him: the need of new Islamic teaching to boost Tunisia's new generation on the road to renewal and change. ʿAshur's notable impact on young Lakhdar was immense. Studying under a distinctively enlightened scholar of Islam opened new avenues for young Lakhdar to follow through. With ʿAshur's teachings and instructions, Lakhdar was willing and able to accept different

[382] Charles Kurzman identifies three traditions of Islamic political movements into three groups: *Customary Islam* (a combination of regional practices and those that are shared throughout the Islamic world.) *Revivalist Islam* (revolution and revision of customary Islam) and *Liberal Islam* (defines itself in contrast to the customary tradition and calls upon the past in the name of modernity. See Charles Kurzman. *Liberal Islam*. NY, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

interpretation/reading of the *Quran*, that seem incongruent with the prevailing religiosity in the rest of the Middle East. Yet, the cracks ʿAshur's teachings induced on young Lakhdar would lead to sheer splits in his orientation, an unintended outcome that ʿAshur certainly would not welcome.

What started as a relatively liberal Islam with ʿAshur to serve the public good of Tunisians, became a complete anti-theology with Lakhdar. In 2011, Lakhdar revisited his experience in the first seminars with ʿAshur describing the scene, "'Ashur came to teach the higher education circle at 10am [in Zitouna] that's when I crept out of my classroom to attend his *Ḥalaqah* (circle), indifferent to the zero that I would receive." [383] When ʿAshur noticed young Lakhdar's interest with this teaching, he was "quick to take me under his wings." Though Lakhdar did not instantly turn a secular scholar, the road for his "problematic secularism" was charted as we will see below.

Lakhdar grew up exquisitely compliant to the diversity of ideas in Tunisia as he was exposed early on to different modes of religiosity in Islam. He absent-mindedly broke many Islamic rules that amount to taboos in other places in the Middle East. Should one attribute Lakhdar's disposition toward secularism to his early education and his exposition to a relatively tolerant Islam? Even though Ibn 'Ashur's pluralistic Islam exerted a vast influence on Lakhdar's early childhood, Islam was not the only factor in the making of a vanguard of secularism in the Arab world. To fully grasp what he means by ʿAlamniyya, that rarely figured in his early writings of the 1960-70s, one should turn to interrogate the cultural and social constellation that completed his transition from one end of the spectrum to the other. Years of dispossession and deprivation had dared Lakhdar to be transgressive, goaded him to trample cultural taboos, thrusted him to take excessive measures.

Distraught and vulnerable, Lakhdar was doomed to live in a traditional society that prizes family and despises broken families, which usually meant incurring debts and paucity. Countryside life in Tunisia stacked many physical and psychological inhibits before young Lakhdar, who instantly turned to be the man in his family with the death of his father. It also was a major factor in shaping his relationship with his mother. His mother could not re-marry after the passing of her husband, for in rural Tunisia under

[383] Al-ʿAfīf Al-Akhḍar: ʿAlāqatī Maʿ Ummī Muftāḥ Shakhṣiyyati."

French colonial rule, "it was a custom not to remarry when you have a grown-up child."[384] Lakhdar invariably felt guilty for depriving his mother of the pleasure of remarrying. His writings that aimed at "freeing Arab societies from its burdening guilt" probably originate in this experience. This guilt petrified adolescent Lakhdar and unnecessarily plagued his relationships with his mother.

The years that followed his father's death were particularly harsh on Lakhdar and his generation. Not only that he lost his childhood innocence at a very young age, but also the deteriorating conditions of post-war Tunisia took staggering tolls on Lakhdar's family. Post WWII Tunisia experienced an economic crisis in agriculture as "many colonial farms" as historian Zussman argued on her book on rural Tunisia, were "abandoned for five years, during which time crops perished, animals died, and equipment disappeared."[385] In his recollections Lakhdar writes that he survived the hardship of the Second World War just barely; five of his brothers could not survive and died very young. Bashīr, his only remaining brother and the only survivor of Tunisian WWII ordeal, grew up to be a lawyer. Death and loss figured frequently in Lakhdar's writings, underwriting his thought on mourning, the past, and memory. The sight of death was a mainstay in his life that triggered him to attempt suicide "20 times in his life."

Schooling Career

Growing up in a hamlet of only a few tents, Lakhdar was not destined to attend school. The village of farmworkers has its own slow rhythm of life and offered all sort of farmhand works but not education. There was no tradition of learning in his family or his village. Schooling, however, was not alien to the village dwellers; learning the *Quran* in the *Kutab* was a daily practice not only to well to do families. No modern school was available in *Makthar* but the *Kutab* filled the gap. It was by mere accident that Lakhdar joined school. In one of the wintery days of the early 1940's when he was 10 years-old, he escorted the son of his father's landowner to school. The school director had him enrolled to classes only to save the deprived child the climatic weather. Indeed, *Makhtar* has unpredictable weather. Dry in the summer, it has a continental climate with significant annual variation in temperature: cold winters and warm summers and occasional snowfall during the first months of the year. It turned out that this capricious weather

[384] Al-'Afīf Al-Akhḍar: 'Alāqatī Ma' Ummī Muftāḥ Shakhṣiyyati.
[385] Zussman, *Development and Disenchantment in Rural Tunisia*, 21.

played well into Lakhdar's hands. Against all odds he ended up enrolling into his village's school that he was not destined to go to and instantly proved a distinguished and gifted boy. His family welcomed this admission and excellence with extraordinary excitement. Ironically, his family's jubilation was not due to their son's success and the promise of breaking away with the entrenched poverty of his village. Rather, Lakhdar parents' euphoria actually rested on religious grounds. In their small world, the parents envisioned their "literate" son to learn how to recite the *Quran* on their grave upon their death. Literacy in rural Tunisia meant for the most part knowing the *Quran* by memory. General knowledge of the *Quran* begot its holders a social esteem and a high status. Dignitaries did not necessarily grasp the intricacies of the *Quran* but knew how to recite it by heart.[386]

The Tunisian educational system at the first half of the twentieth century offered different schooling opportunities. For Lakhdar and his ilk, however, only two ways of Islamic instruction were available and within reach. The French school system, as well as the newly established Alliance school for Jewish students, remained beyond Lakhdar's pale. It was either the *Zitouna* or the more progressive *Sadiq* school that were within reach for Lakhdar, so he was predestinated to attend one of them. He ended up enrolling into *Zitouna* for it was a boarding school with a free tuition. However, he was fortunate to attend a reformed *Zitouna*, a privilege his previous generation could not have entertained.

A constellation of incidents at the beginning of the 20th century led to a series of reforms that shacked the fundamental tenets of this institute. In 1898 Mohammad Bouʾatru, grandfather of Al-Tahir Bin ʿAshūr, decreed a committee to put together a plan to reform the instruction at *Zitouna*. Beside Jurisprudence and religion, grammar and linguistics, Hadith and Kalam, this institute expanded to include modern topics. So it was. The institute embarked on teaching history, geography, arithmetic and geometry, expanding far away from the core "religious" topics. These were eventful years in *Zitouna*. Mohammad ʿAbduh, an awe-inspiring scholar of Islam from Egypt, visited Tunis in 1903 to encourage and support these reforms that stirred controversy in Tunisia at the time. Despite the morale boost that ʿAdbuh's visit

[386] The boundaries between literacy and illiteracy have changed during the twentieth century, rendering Islamic literacy less important as Western knowledge increasingly shifted the meaning of what is literacy. See Michael Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt*, Translation/transnation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

brought to the reform movement, these reforms were chiefly sustained and upheld by new class of progressive scholars: the *Sadiqs*. This was the nickname of students who graduated from the *Sadiq* School, which was established by Khair Al-Dinn in 1874. These students would join *Zitouna* and tilt the balance towards reform-oriented teachers (before it turned back against them after independence.) By the time these reforms took effect, Lakhdar's cohort was the first to reap its fruits. It is by mere accident that he was able to evade the most rigorous Islamic teaching and take advantage of the more open Islamic tradition, which was valorized by the *Sadiqs* and the ʿAshūr family.

Within the *Sadiq* school the ʿAshūr family dominated. Upholding Khair al-Dinn directives and legacy, they took their school as a stage to disseminate Islamic teachings that incorporated Western ideas. Taking their model and inspiration from the contemporary French school system in Tunisia, they challenged the superiority of the traditional *Zitouna* School, which callously steered away from French model and called for a strict interpretation of the *Quran*. Many graduates from the openly reform minded *Sadiq School* would penetrate the *Zitouna* School at the late 1930s, moderating its animosity and acrimony to different readings of Islamic texts. Lakhdar's generation was the first to favorably benefit from this temporary fusion between the reform-oriented *Sadiq* teachers and the conservative-bent *Zitouna* institute. Nowhere, however, *Zitouna* was to be seen as a liberal institute for Islamic teaching. Despite the merge of the Sadiq students in *Zitouna*, the new *Sadiq* teachers would soon be squeezed out and remain a marginal factiona within this obsolete institute.

Yet, despite the drastic changes in *Zitouna's* curricula, Lakhdar describes a fairly gloomy experience in this institution in its high years. He attended this school thanks to a financial help of his uncle soon after completing the *Kutab*.[387] He was not a suitable fit for this school/mosque of which renowned medieval philosopher Ibn Khaldun graduated. More than 1300 years old, the oldest *madrassa* in the Islamic and Arab world, the *Zitouna* nonetheless kept focusing primarily on Arabic and Islamic studies after the reforms. Lakhdar owes his oceanic knowledge of theology and Arabic, two topics he

387 In a series of articles in the online daily *Elaph*, the journal's editors invited a number of significant Arab intellectuals to retell the stories of events that changed their lives. Lafif Lakhdar was the first guest to write about his youthful in the *L'universite Zitouna*, probably the first university in the world.

profusely wrote about, to these years at *Zitouna*. It is plausible to argue that Lakhdar's painful experience in *Zitouna* was prescribed even before he embarked on his studies at this institute. Two years before enrolling in *Zitouna*, he stumbled on Taha Hussain's *Al-Ayyam*, the first autobiography in Arabic that reverberated around the Arab world for years. It is not the nostalgia that caught Lakhdar's attention upon reading *Al-Ayyam* as the dreadful experience Hussain endured in *Al-Azhar*. Hussain retells his longing and dreams as a child to attend *Al-Azhar* only to turn against its directives and philosophy as a student. Lakhdar was seized by *Al-Ayyam's* spirit, who was 18-years-old when he read this gripping autobiography. He soon "took the pledge to become a writer like Hussain" whose travels to Paris presented him with a preliminary blueprint of a life well worth imitating. Like Hussain's experience in *Al-Azhar*, Lakhdar vividly recounts being alienated and secluded in the *Zitouna* institution that loathed and detested Egyptian writers he clandestinely endeared. Students at *Zitouna,* Lakhdar recalls, were "alarmingly reprimanded to steer clean from Egyptian writers"[388] for these Egyptian writers were commonly accused of questioning Islamic faith by undermining the authority of medieval scholars such as Bukhari, the author of one of the *Sihah Hadiths* compilations. Lakhdar retells an illuminating episode in which he was caught reading a book by Salama Musa on Darwin theory. Surreptitiously, he also managed to put his hands on Egyptian writer al-ʿAqād's controversial work "*Allah*," (God) which validates his initial "doubts about religions."[389] In this book, al-ʿAqād tells the story of the creation and the later emergence of the divine doctrine. Al-ʿAqād unveils the intermingled story of man and God. It is a story of how man took gods to be God, a story about man's long path from polytheism to monotheism. Reading this Egyptian literature forever recast the child from *Makthar*, sanctioning his unsubstantiated suspicions about God's revealing truths.

With his reading of Egyptian literature, the contrast between Lakhdar and his milieu grew palpable. He resentfully reiterates his exclusion while being labeled "*Mu*ʿ*tazili*", which, he says, was synonymous to *zindiq* (undercover renegade.) This experience would not ever leave him, but increasingly impress upon his personality. "The house, the school, and the wrenching poverty all contrived to destroy my self-confidence." He asserts, "I was fortunate that the Tunisian National Library, not far away from the school,

[388] Al-ʿAfīf Al-Akhḍar: ʿAlāqatī Maʿ Ummī Muftāḥ Shakhṣiyyati.
[389] Ibid.

gave me the opportunity to build my self-confidence step by step."[390] Taha Hussain, Salama Musa, and al-Aqād, the three *nahḍawi* scholars whose scholarship restructured modern Arab literary imaginations, held a grip on young Lakhdar in navigating his life.

Surviving unsympathetic high school, Lakhdar's feelings of un-belonging grew stronger by each passing day. He, nonetheless, would pursue his higher education in Law school in the capital, Tunis. It is here, at this multicultural city with its francophone-oriented culture, that he wears off his rural provincialism and open up to the world. Francophobic culture saturated Tunis, the capital, and remained as such years after the departure of the *colon* in March 1956. It is not clear how he managed to get into the capital and attend this school. One can certainly argue that he followed his reading as guidance to his life, dismissing real life hardships. His harping on "the long-lasting impact of reading experiences at the National Library" must not be brushed away. Lakhdar envisioned a different future than the one his background proscribed to him. This vision, formed in his youth, was shaped by Taha Hussain's autobiography, but also by a pressing feeling that he belonged to a different setting. The label *Muʿtazili* meant for him more than swimming against the stream. He was a complete outsider, an exile in his hometown, the true outcast. As he retells these sporadic incident, the meaning of secularism, articulated against everything traditional, repressive, and even poverty, unfolds.

Political Engagement in Tunis

Though Lakhdar chose to study Law, he had a tepid passion about it when compared to his insatiable appetite for Arabic poetry and humanities. As soon as he graduated in 1957, his career as an attorney came to an abrupt, and quite dramatic end. One of the first contentious cases in Tunisian court history came his way. A certain Sāleḥ Najār, a defector of the main Dustor party, roiled Tunisian politics at its first decade when he was falsely accused of attempting a political murder of premier Habib Bourguibah (1956-1987), Tunisia's first president.[391] The defection and rancor within the Dustor party shaped Tunisian politics in its first decade. Lakhdar was student affiliated with the Dustor party of

390 Ibid.

391 Najār joined another exiled leader of the party Bin Yusouf, who before splitting ways with Bourguiba's Dustor Party on grounds of French proposal for Tunisian independence, was a close friend of the president, in Egypt.

Bourguibah, when the main party was split into two parties on the eve of the independence. The hard wing of the Dustor party, led by Sāleḥ Bin Yousuf and Sāleḥ Najār, refused to accept French authorities bid for Tunisian independence as the French protectorate approached its end. Bourguibah, on the other hand, headed the moderate wing, which was poised to compromise with the French on the nature and size of the new independent state and therefore agreed to accommodate French bid for independence.

The rupture within the Dustor party, the main national party that guided the nation to its independence since 1934, into two rivalries was an event that molded Bourguibah's personality and approach. Bourgibah's one-handed *diktats* and repressive policies were haunted by this historic breakup of the party that at one point seemed to shatter the very existence of the country. Always cautious and wary, president Bourguibah saw danger lurking to his new regime from those who deserted his party and took refuge, and encouragement, from Nasser of Egypt. Sāleḥ Najār and Bin Yusuf, harangued Bourguibah from Egypt. Nasser used them as political venues to express his discontented with Tunisian's leader who was deeply suspicious of pan-Arabism and doggedly refused to align himself with Nasser. Bourguibah's disagreement with Nasser put him on a collision course with many Arab countries.

Lakhdar, only 20-years-old, was a fresh lawyer when he took to defend Najār and his three conspirators for their failed attempt on Bourguibah's life. As a new lawyer, Lakhdar solemnly believed that his defendants were victims to what he called later an "enlightened despot." The idea of "enlightened despot" reflects how Lakhdar and his generation felt toward their president. Bourgibah was a very fascinating but capricious man. He "sought reconciliation and partnership with Europe"[392] but he never backed down on his righteous place in Tunisian politics. As one of the leading figures of the Dustor Party, and the founding father of Tunisia, Bourguibah thought of himself as the legitimate president of this small country.[393]

Standing up against Tunisian authorities proved detrimental to the young and novice lawyer. Lakhdar's defendants were soon executed (except Najār who flee to Egypt) and the authorities imposed on Lakhdar an open-ended house arrest for his "forged evidence" of potential murderers of the president.

[392] Zussman, *Development and Disenchantment in Rural Tunisia*, 8.
[393] Derek Hopwood, *Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia: The Tragedy of Longevity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992).

Lakhdar, apparently, did not grasp what is at stake for premier Bourguibah. However, Lakhdar managed to flee the country in a matter of three years. In 1961, with the help of a group of Algerian Marxists close to Ben Bella, a well-known fighter against French colonialism in Algeria and the first prime minister, Lakhdar left Tunisia initially to Algeria and then to Paris. In one of the last articles published a few months before committing a convulsing suicide in his Parisian apartment, Lafif Lakhdar wrote that his self-imposed exile in Paris on 1 October 1961 as his true birthdate.

First Journey to Europe: Intellectual formation

Before leaving Tunisia fleeing the restrictive house arrest, to which he would return only briefly 20 years later in 1981, Lakhdar could not evade the heat of politics that ripped through Tunisia. In his childhood, Lakhdar's political orientations were shaped by the controversies around the reforms in *Zitouna*. In his youth, however, Lakhdar's politics were formed around Tunisian independence. Soon after its independence declaration, Tunisia's legendary president passed the Personal Affairs Law (*Qanun al-Ahwal Al-Shakshiyya*) in 1956, that in more than one way set Tunisia apart from the rest of the Arab world. While the majority of Arab states heavily borrowed their constitutions from a variety of Western models, they were reluctant and wary of effecting any change in the family laws. John Esposito, a veteran historian of the Arab world, pointed out that "while most Muslim governments replaced Islamic law with legal systems inspired by western secular codes, Muslim family law (marriage, divorce, and inheritance) remained in force."[394] Tunisia was different. The Personal Affairs Law (PAL) passed by Bourguibah was unique since it enshrined women's rights in the constitution by explicitly setting limits on girls' marriage age at 17 and men at 20. It was the first, and the most profound, law that amended old-dated family laws that prevailed in the Middle East.[395] The Sheikhs of *Zitouna* met the PAL with fierce rejection not on the grounds that it outlaws polygamy, nor for the fact that this new law gives full rights for Tunisian women to balk at arranged marriages, disobey forced marriages, and dispute divorce. For many Sheikhs, however, curtailing men's pejoratives are not much of concern as the consequences these reforms made possible.

[394] Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (NYU Press, 2000), 2.
[395] For a critical study of the Personal Law as a law that emerged in the 19th century see: Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

The PAL not only set in motion new politics, but also remade history and the way it is remembered and practiced. According to Saba Mahmood, who conceder this law as a new invention of the nineteenth-century, though the law is Islamic, it nonetheless was an European creation. Mahmood argues that "while the colonizers imposed their own forms of commercial, criminal, and procedural codes in the colonies, the family laws they devised were understood to emanate from the religious and customary laws of the native peoples. Given that religion was understood to embody the "true spirit" of the colonized people (recall the Orientalist construction of "the East" as essentially religious and spiritual), it is not surprising that family law came to be grounded in the religious traditions of the communities that the colonial powers ruled over for 150 years. Notably, just as family law was invented from fragments of various juridical and customary traditions, so was the univocality and unanimity of the religious traditions to which the newly formulated family law was supposed to correspond."[396] While Bourguibah and his affiliates thought that they were defending progressive morals and remaking the new Arab man, they also thought that anyone who disputes the rational of the PAL is illiterate, conservatives, and patriarchal. The categories that the new law engendered or reinforced (progressive verses backward, reformer verses conservative, modern verses traditional) influenced Lakhdar's vocabulary and outlook.

During these years, Lakhdar found himself fencing off any critique against the law; he was completely engrossed by Bourguibah's politics of modernity, progressivism, and crude secularism. He would campaign and lobby the PAL in villages and country towns around Tunisia with other students who were part of the Dustor Party's student charter. Repeating the same ideas taunted by Bourguibah, Lakhdar grew accustomed to a new political dictionary. This encounter with the "traditional" and "conservative" movement reasserted to Lakhdar that Bourguibah's ideas of progress rang true. This encounter was not neutral however. It framed young Lakhdar's early ideas while helping in forming his visions. Though not confrontational at this point of his intellectual evolution, Lakhdar had certainly marked the direction and outlines his forthcoming thinking towards his secularism.

[396] Mahmood, 120–121.

The introduction of PAL touched off a trench war between modernists and conservatives, between Francophone Tunisian elite in the capital and the rest. Though the disparity between rural and urban Tunisia is not new, with the new politics of Bourguibah's modernity, this split was increasingly politicized and weaponized. Lakhdar, aware of the advantages of the law, supported it passionately. Suddenly, and against all odds, the inhabitant of *Makthar* found himself aligned with the Tunisian elite against his countrymen. That new affiliation and alignment affected his political outlook and shaped his intellectual position. Lakhdar turned from a villager to a true urbanite, from a rural child to a cosmopolitan. When he fled Tunisia in 1961, Lakhdar was already deeply politicized.

His first foray to Paris did not last more than a few months however. Lakhdar would leave Paris for East Europe, passing through East Germany to get to Czechoslovakia where he lived and experienced firsthand the life under *socialism*. His short stint in Eastern Europe would disappoint him, impress on him an undeniable doubt about *socialism*. Though Lakhdar remained a staunch Socialist at this point in his life, some qualms began chipping away at his earlier believes in Socialism and Marxism. What he saw in East Europe was dystopic, a less than worthy model to imitate. Soon, with the news of the looming independence of Algeria in 1962, he would leave Europe for a longer stay in the Middle East, where he developed as a writer.

Exploring the Middle East

It is puzzling how Lakhdar managed to reach out to so many influential personalities. With the long anticipated independence of Algeria in 1962, Lakhdar was lured to leave East Europe and headed back to the newly independent country to live the socialism experiment. In Algiers, he succeeded in establishing a close and sustained relationship with Algeria's first President Ahmad Ben Bella through his resistance group that fought France. This is the same group of revolutionaries that helped Lakhdar flee the house arrest after his case with Najār failed. Lakhdar's sympathy towards Algeria's fight against the French colon was shaped his Marxist ideas. As he attested Marxism had infiltrated his mind not for ideological as much as practical reasons: "hopeless poverty inflected me with narcissistic wounds that formulated my political conviction since childhood…so I was not driven [to Marxism] by deep theoretical

conventions but only by class instincts."[397] But why did he turn to Marxism? One could argue that Marx writings had their moment in the Middle East at the time. Marxism enhanced Lakhdar's capacity to express his thought and enabled him to articulate and rework his ideas on poverty. "I projected my resentment towards the rich who wounded my narcissism, namely humiliated me as a child and adolescent, on the rich whom I finally found a miracle term to call: bourgeoisie."[398] Marxism opened a new horizon for Lakhdar and his generation and had a revolutionary affect on the Arabic speaking world; not only facilitating a new way to decipher an old, complex societal hierarchy, but also hammering out a new language that allowed intellectuals to better voice their concerns about long-standing injustices and inequality in Arab societies. Marxism was a vocabulary as much as a revolution. Words like class, anachronism, proletariat were buzzwords as Lakhdar was growing up out of his village provincialism. Upon reading the *Capital*, for example, Lakhdar wrote in 1965 in *Arab Studies* that it relocated him to "a different mental continent." Such was the extent to which Marxism echoed and resonated among Lakhdar's generation.

In Algeria, Ben Bella put him in touch with the editors of "*Al-Thūra wal-ʿAmal*" an unassailable Marxist journal, where he initiated a career in writing. Regrettably, Ben Bella was overthrown after merely two and a half years in power in a bloodless military coup led by army strongman and his close friend Houari Boumadianne in 1965. Lakhdar was shoved out of this new post-colonial state that was preoccupied with healing its wounds from the 130 years of French colonization. His close friendship with Ben Bellah, now under house arrest, lasted longer however. Ben Bella was released to Paris upon the passing of Boumadianne in 1980, where he crossed paths with Lakhdar. It is highly probable that throughout the 1980s Ben Bella financed and bankrolled Lakhdar's work.[399] Ben Bella led a fairly comfortable life despite his exile. His popularity among Arab leaders with a national bent; his experiments at land reforms and past heroic fighting against colonial France gained him public appeal in the Arab world. Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussain, infused him with money from which Lakhdar benefited.[400]

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[397] elaph, "Rahil Al-Mufakir Al-Tunisi Al-'Afif Al-Akhdar."
[398] Ibid.
[399] Lakhdar first translation work from French was Ben Bella's biography into Arabic.
[400] **http://www.djazairnews.info/trace/37-trace/57879-2013-07-01-17-38-50.html**

Lakhdar spent twelve years in the Mashriq as soon as he left Algeria. It was in Beirut where he associated and immersed himself with the nascent Palestinian resistance factions, which both earned him precious familiarity with the main scholarly journals in the Arab world and offered him extensive visibility. Before setting sail to Beirut, Lakhdar was not ideological yet. In Beirut, however, his radicalism and ideology hardened. Beirut was a true home for Lakhdar, a safe heaven for scores of exiled and displaced writers, poets, and authors like him. Lakhdar continued his writing, now tinged with Marxist tone, on the failed resistance of the Palestinian parties. In 1971 he published his first book *From Parisian Commune to Amman Massacre*, a work that compared the failures of the two defeated movements: The Parisian Commune that was crushed and shattered in the 1870s and the Palestinian resistance in Black October 1970. His comrade, Ṣādiq al-ʿAẓm, a firm and unapologetic Marxist, provided him with a decent shelter and access to the main journals and intellectual community. Lakhdar's first writings also met ʿAẓm's foremost interests: criticizing the resistance and its strategies. It was here that he translated the Marxist *Manifesto* in 1968.Yet Beirut cultural war took a staggering toll and left him indignant and deeply enraged.

Lakhdar's initial frustration stemed from his unamiable debates with hardheaded socialists and dedicated Arab Marxists, who commonly called Arab Leninists. In the years before and after the 1967 war, the Arab cultural landscape was exploding with intellectual debates on Marxism and Existentialism many of which spilled over into daily debates in cafes and public squares. The numerous political and academic journals that appeared at this time bear witness to this cultural effervescence. In this climate, all ideas were up for debates except doubting or calling into question Marxism. To criticize Marxism in those years amounted to a sheer political suicide, a sheer intellectual madness. This was precisely the path Lakhdar took when he made public his qualms and misgivings about Marxism after his visit to East Europe. He was instantly accused of treason. Treason is the word his close friend and one of the main comrades of Marxism in those years, Yassin Al-Hafiz, used to describe Lakhdar. The latter accused him of espionage. Mohammad Yazīd, Algeria's ambassador in Beirut, claimed that he knew the bank account

number the CIA had opened to channel money to Lakhdar.[401] Lakhdar's main blasphemy, it turned out, was that he assaulted Marxism and its application in the Arab world. But what Lakhdar's question reveals is that Arab Marxism was not a mere ideology- it was a consecrated identity.

"Marx was a dreamer" Lakhdar would write in the late 1990s, recalling the events of late 1960s', that left him hermit and recluse. "One ought not forget that Marx idealism/utopianism came to him through his reading of sacred books that enforced the idea of Mahdi."[402] Repudiating Marxism, however, meant losing the entitlement to prestigious intellectual clubs, journals, intellectual salons and publications. Lakhdar, the rising intellectual from North Africa, the new scout in the highly ideological intellectual scene in Beirut, fell out of grace abruptly. This is how a promising, daring, and genuine intellectual was blocked and marginalized. Before even starting his career, Lakhdar's innovation was stifled. His articles were rejected and many publishers would shun publishing his works. Jūrj Ṭarābishī, the editor of the journal Arabic Studies (*Dirasat ʿArabiyya*) during the 1970s, was one of these publishers who declined Lakhdar's articles. Lakhdar would vanish thereafter. Beirut offered a bubbly intellectual scene but was intolerant towards, always unforgivable, of difference. Lakhdar feeling squeezed out of the main stage of the intellectual debates, left to Paris, holding grudge against editors like Ṭarābishī, probably the most influential figure among Arab intellectuals, for purposely marginalizing him and rejecting his articles.

A late-comer to Marxist philosophy, Lakhdar was among the first to revoke it. He took on himself the Marxist mantle because it resonated with his life condition in Tunisia and Algeria. In Beirut, however, Marxism looked to him extremely theoretical. Isolated, disgruntled, and aloof, Lakhdar had a deep belief that no one could understand and appreciate his intellectual positions. He failed to convince his Arab comrades of what he had seen in East Europe. The countless shortcomings of the Socialist model he observed first hand, which featured squalid conditions, crowded living, and abject poverty, continued to inspire countless Arab intellectuals, to his dismay. Through his exchanges with Eastern Europeans, Lakhdar understood that Marxism makes a huge disservice to these peoples, perpetuate social disparities, and even outmaneuver lower classes. As far as Lakhdar is concerned many Arab intellectuals overlooked

[401] Al-ʿAfīf Al-Akhḍar: ʿAlāqatī Maʿ Ummī Muftāḥ Shakhṣiyyati.
[402]

or were simply unaware of this socialist excessiveness. His suspicions grew stronger since that visit. Lakhdar has never overcome that first-hand impression, it was an experience which was etched his psych permanently. In his writings, however, he directed his criticism against Arab Leninists and Arab socialism and less to Marxism as an ideology.[403] This was the ground on which he decided to leave to Paris.

Truth Between Lakhdar and Ghannushi

Paris was no strage city for Lakhdar. A vast network of Arab intellectual activities flourished in Paris with Lakhdar's arrival in 1979. Hundreds of Lebanese writers fleeing the civil war in Lebanon took refuge in the city of lights. An extensive Arabic publishing houses flourished in Paris, with intellectual circles, journals, and even Arab news all endowed Paris with a home feeling for Lakhdar. In fact, it was in Paris that his connection to his original country emerged. From the northen rim of the Meditterranean, Lakhdar began writing a weekly column, publishing his first works on the Turāth. His initial debates with Arab Marxists gave way to high interest in commenteries on Tunisian politics and culture.

In March 2005, a book on the life of prophet Mohammad, entitled *The Unknown in the Prophet's Life* (al-Majhūl min Ḥayat al-Rasūl) was published, stirring a startling controversy in Tunisia. The book posted very serious questions around Mohammad's 'virile' behavior and doubted his genealogy- (questioning whether or not his mother Amina was truly pregnant with him when her husband passed away while probing the identity of Mohammad's true father). The book was signed under the pseudonym *Al-Maqrizi*, the name of a medieval historian who lived in Egypt between 1364-1442. The preface, however, was signed by the name *Nāhid*. The concealments and enigma around the identity of the author

403 Lenin and Leninism was a different matter. Lenin offered a new interpretation of Marxism that had a great appeal among the Arab intelligentsia. Defying Marx and Hegel, Lenin believed in "skipping historical stages," disposed with the "historical dialectic" valorized by Hegel and Marx. According to Hegel and Marx, societies advance not through skipping stages but by living and exhausting them. The Russian revolution of 1917 disproved their theory by showing that a non-Bourgeoisie society, like the Russian society, can revolt against their leaders and advance to a post-Bourgeoisie society without experiencing the stages in between. This revolution instilled the feeling that Third World societies are poised to skip the "Bourgeoisie stage" to revolt against them. Arab thinkers with Leninist tendencies took this idea that Arab societies can reach democracy before rooting in tradition and a culture of Bourgeoisie, an interpretation that Lafif Lakhdar fought ferociously. Ayyub Abou Dayyah, *Tanmiyyat al-Takhkhaluf al-ʿArabi.* (Beirut: Dar Al-Farabi, n.d.).

fueled public and intellectual debates that incidentally embroiled Lakhdar.[404] Why were the fingers pointed at Lakhdar?

Rāshid Ghannoushi, the leader of the chief Islamic party in Tunisia (*Ennahda)*, published a scathing denunciation of the book while insinuating that Lakhdar, or one of his coterie, was the author of the book. [405] This statement rose the stakes of this otherwise insignificant book and immediately emotions ran high among Arab intellectuals. In a world torn between Islamic *fatwas* and authoritarian regimes, this declaration was "construed as a *fatwa* condemning Akhdar [Lakhdar] to death" states the Haaretz newspaper.[406] One more secular writer was marked. That condemnation/fatwa sent waves of dread and mortification among Arab intellectuals like Lakhdar. Physical violence against secular intellectuals had been regular and had grown steadily ever since the 1980s. In Cairo militants used guns and explosions to scare off tourists and impose their culture on society. In 1992 they murdered Egyptian writer Faraj Fudah.[407] In Khartoum, militants publicly executed Mohammad Mahmood Taha for his critical writings and unrestrained pronouncements against Islam. On June 22, 1993, Algerian Mohammed Boukhobza, a professor of sociology, had his throat slit in his home by five fundamentalists who tied up his daughter and forced her to watch. Alarmed and petrified, Arab intellectuals rushed to support Lakhdar's free speech regardless of what the book called for. Although Lakhdar had denied writing the book, the accusations forced him to respond and soon he got embroiled in a debate that he did not want.

The memory of the despicable murder of anti-theological writers fed fear and panic among Lakhdar and progressive intellectuals. Yet, while these incidents rarely led to murdering Arab intellectuals (except in few and extraordinary cases) they nonetheless framed Arab intellectuals on the Left as secularists, a term that took on a new meaning. Though secularism was available condition before these accusations and incidents, these incidents re-enacted and reaffirm the secular identity. These intellectuals

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[404] The book has never been published as a hard copy but remained online, which increased the secrecy and with it the desire to disclose the author.

[405] The unsigned declaration on the *Ennahda* website that implicated Lafif Lakhdar, without naming him directly. I couldn't find the original copy of this declaration in 5/6/2005 on the Internet. Parts of it was cited in Lakhdar's own writings.

[406] "The Roots of Jihad," Haaretz.com, accessed April 6, 2015, http://www.haaretz.com/cmlink/the-roots-of-jihad-1.182958.

[407] Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics in the Middle East Liberal Thought and Islamic Challenge in Egypt* (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).

also played their role to reinforce a narrative of duality in the contemporary Arab world where they conceived of themselves fighting uncompromised Islamists, conservatives, and fundamentalists on the other side of the intellectual spectrum. This newfound duality branded them mistakenly secular scholars intent on smearing Islam, desacralizing Mohammad and questioning his prophecy. In other words, secularism took its new meaning less from Europe, but through the immediacy of the growing violence against Arab intellectuals on the Left. The violence here worked to secure these intellectuals as secularists, reframing them from the previously known Arab Left to secularism.

The executions, slaying and slaughtering of irreligious intellectuals was still fresh memory among Arab intellectuals. While these events are tragic, they also created new identities. It is within this understanding that within two months of the condemnation of Lakhdar that more than 600 intellectuals and academics denounced incitements against writers for expressing their ideas and signed a petition. The Arab organization for the Protection of Freedom of Expression and the Press organized a petition against 'obscurantist religious extremism,' which called for the protection of Lakhdar's life and freedom. I want to argue here that what this petition was doing is much more than protecting Lakhdar's right to write freely. In fact, this petition was naming things, securing the current narrative and reinforcing arbitrary dualities. It also remade Lakhdar's secular identity, previously vague and ambiguous. It drew capricious boundaries and institutionalized the dualities between the two factions. Lakhdar's name, suffering for long time from obscurity and marginalization, resurrected and grew stronger as a rising secular thinker. As far as Lakhdar is concerned, it was Ghannoushi, whose portrait the Western media championed as a rational and moderate Islamist and reformer,[408] who stood behind that incitement. Lakhdar's secular thinking had never been as crystal clear as when it was compared with his countryman- Ghannoushi. In his mind Ghannoushi envisioned moderate Islam as the only path through which Arab world problems are resolved. Lakhdar maintained that moderate Islam is the source of all problems in the Middle East. Two men, two perspectives.

Lakhdar Work on Turāth

[408] "Moderates or Manipulators? Tunisia's Ennahda Islamists," *Henry Jackson Society* (blog), accessed May 10, 2015, http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2012/09/13/moderates-or-manipulators-tunisias-ennahda-islamists/.

Ghannoushi's accusations based on a substantial evidence. Three years after that notorious book on the life of Mohammad, Lakhdar published one of his most original writings which, indeed, was on the life of Muhammad. In *From Mohammad al-Iman to Historic Mohammad,* (Min Mohammad al-Īmān ila Mohammad al-Tarīkh) Lakhdar cites many of the *Hadiths* that also figure in *The Unknown from the Prophet Life*. One should bear in mind that Ghannoushi claimed that both the writing style and reasoning of the disowned biography of Mohammad clearly suggests that Lakhdar was behind the work, if not as an author, then certainly as an advisor. Ghannoushi might have been right given the historical record Lakhdar had. During the 1960s, Lakhdar published more than a dozen works under fake names like Hamdan Al-Kamati, Abou Munis, and Muntasir ʿAlaykum.

What was in this work that broke the cultural taboo? Lakhdar contemptuously brushed the book aside as Christian propaganda (the book was published in a Christian website *Kalemah*.) The book tells the unknown story of Mohammad's life through his wives' perspective. The prophet emerged as salacious, sexually driven, and even savagely licentious. More distressing to its Arab readers is the image that Mohammad bends diverse '*Quranic* verses' to satiate his human needs. Unfettered by any moral and ethical inhibition, Mohammad perceived himself as sultan more than a spiritual, peace seeking leader. Though this is not a far cry from Lakhdar's work on Mohammad childhood, that explores the lasting effects of several incidents on the formation of the prophet's personality.

In *Min Mohammad al-Īmān ila Mohammad al-Tarīkh*, Lakhdar's last work addresses contemporary understanding of Mohammad's image as a vehicle to redress the Turāth. Lakhdar reconstructs Mohammad's human condition by deconstructing the sacred status around him. Only by historically reconstructing the circumstances that shaped Mohammad and his first circle, Lakhdar maintained, writers can show ordinary Muslims the way out of their current predicament, a way that can reconcile their Islamic beliefs with modernity.

To destabilize prevalent cultural attitudes regarding Mohammad in the Turāth, and to bring about a paradigm shift, Lakhdar saw fit to embark on the staggering pursuit of reconstructing the world of the prophet Mohammad. At first, the exploration of a staunch Arab Leftist of Mohammad's life seemed to reinforce the thesis that many Arab Leftists turned to Islam. Yet, Lakhdar waded into the subtle theme of

Mohammad's childhood, a period that is infamously vague and particularly ambiguous. In light of the paucity of details about Mohammad's childhood, Lakhdar premised his work on the hypothesis that the "*Quran* is no more than Mohammad's autobiography." This hypothesis must not be rejected right away given that all the available facts about the true, historic Mohammad in his childhood, barely reach "one and half pages" and the rest are "myths."[409]

"It is impossible to penetrate the jungle of Muhammad's psychological personality except through the 6236 verses of the *Quran*." (p.15) The entire *Quran* (6236 verses) not only reflects the life of Mohammad, but in many ways reveals the "unconscious of Muhammad, with all its ambiguities, confusions, and sentimental contradictions." Mohammad led an inherently unstable and tumultuous life and that is conveyed in the *Quran*, writes Lakhdar. Even without resorting to the *sira* literature, which is bent on fabricating a flawless prophet, one could learn about the personality of Mohammad through the *Quran*, Mohammad "turns from one end to the opposite other, from fatalism to a free choice, from a wonton conscious in Mecca, to his absent conscious in Medina." For Lakhdar, Mohammad had two distinguished personalities, "a prophet and poet in Mecca" and "legislator and warrior in Medina." (p.15)

The preliminary idea that the *Quran* is ultimately Mohammad's autobiography that exposes his "unconsciousness and contradictions" is supported by a new definition of the underlying idea of prophecy (*nibuwah).* "The scientific conceptualization of prophecy is that it is a raving affect, namely, ravings and hallucinations that come out of human brain that requires treatment." (p.11) Shedding the myths that accrued around Mohammad throughout fourteen hundred years is an essential step in the long journey of "cultural re-foundation" that enable Muslims to "live their times." For Lakhdar this is the *rational Islam* that will be the "wellspring for next generations' historical knowledge and the history that constitute its collective consciousness." (p.19)

The child Mohammad was not born a schizophrenic but he became one, contends Lakhdar, in one of his many provocative statements. Born to a merely twenty-year-old mother who lost her husband during pregnancy, Mohammad grew up at the hands of a "broken-down" Amina who "lost her nerves" watching

[409] All citations in this section are taken from al-ʿAfīf al-Akhḍar. *Min Muḥammad al-īmān ilá Muḥammad al-Tārīkh.* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2014).

her husband die in front of her eyes. She was in a deep state of mourning as Mohammad came to this world, jolted and distressed from grief and dejection. The "presumption that Mohammad's mother was a pessimist is consequently not a far-fetched idea" argues Lakhdar. Amina was soon to send Mohammad off, first, to a nearby wet nurse, Thuwaībah, who was a recently liberated slave of Mohammad's despised uncle Abou Lahab. Later on, however, enfant Mohammad was delivered to a famous wet nurse Halimah al-Saʿdiyyah and "probably to many others." The persistent instability that Mohammad experienced in his infancy had detrimental repercussions on his adulthood, Lakhdar asserts. "It left him neurotic"- one's aversion to take risks and his compulsive search for safety lead him to put himself in the riskiest and most dangerous situation. Mohammad ended up choosing known dangers over unknown ones.

Stories from pre-Islamic times made it highly probable that Amina, Mohammad's mother, experienced a particularly prolonged period of sorrow and suffering, like many female poets made it clear at time of grief, "there is little doubt that her mourning [over her husband's death] seeped into Mohammad's lobes of brain as she was pregnant with him." It is not unlikely that "the psychological pressures, anxiety, phobias, obsessions, tragedies, and repeated shocks and traumas that Amina endured during pregnancy shaped the new born Mohammad." Lakhdar cites newly published French psychological research to affirm "the impact of the personal psychology of pregnant women on her fetus is a biological fact that science has ascertained. This impact prepared the new born Mohammad to have a depressed and schizophrenic personality." (p. 38-39.)

Mohammad's schizophrenic personality was reinforced by the proportionally high regularity of separating traumas he had to endure, as he was just few weeks old. Why is parting ways with mothers constitutes an everlasting trauma? asks Lakhdar. "Because the infant imagines himself in the very first months as a biological extension of his mother. Therefore he cries in protest when she ceases nursing him. In their first year, infants develop acute awareness of their parent's affection and love…in this way infants develop a strong feeling that they are beloved and taken care of, and they are worth in the eyes of both their parents. This satisfactory environment that supports a sense of security and compassion enables infants to integrate into this world and in this phase their psychological personality takes shape- through assimilating and adopting positions, feelings, and vocal symbols that come from their mothers." (p.39) In

the absence of his father, and in the light of sending him to probably "apathetic and indifferent wet nurses," Mohammad grew up in a "fake familial milieu." Scores of stories, though unreliable, in the *sira* literature ascertain that Mohammad was petulant and aggressive in his childhood. "In reality, the emotional repression that Mohammad endured, and the violent traumas that he went through as fetus and infant prepared him to be bellicose: aggressive towards himself and towards others." (p.41)

The miracles that the *sira* literature ascribe to Mohammad's birth and the "light" that came out of Amina as she delivered him, or the easy pregnancy that she had, are all but the "unconscious spices necessary for the making of a hero, the fateful man. This attempt is no more than a conscious attempt to silent the unsaid: the truth that Amina disliked her son Mohammad." (p.42-43)

Mohammad was born guilt ridden, affirms Lakhdar. This overwhelming sense of guilt led to his constant depression and frustration. "The seeds of his depressed personality were sown in him with his journey from the first three phases [of his development]: as a fetus inside a grieving mother's womb, as infant with a callous wet nurse that 'tore' him apart from his [biological] mother, and as a child where he witnessed the tragedy of the death of his mother. He was only six years old when his mother died in front of his eyes on their way between Mecca and Medina." (p.43)

"Those 'catastrophic effects' of the bodily separation from mothers at a very young age, left their marks on Mohammad's personality, and dictated his behavior for the rest of his life. Mohammad's raving jealousy to possess so many wives, for instance, while forbidding them from marrying others after his death, is rooted in the severe trauma of early separation from his mother." Wives unconsciously recall mothers' image, Lakhdar adds. "Is it possible that the prophet of Islam compensated, unconsciously, his failure to be close to his mother, by possessing so many wives?" wonders Lakhdar. (p. 44)

Absence of parental compassion in infancy "obstructs maturity" and hinders a healthy process of "independence of the character." Mohammad endured a particularly "harsh Oedipal phase in his childhood since he had more than one "father" who took care of him, and his [necessary] clashes with them instill an uncompromising "superego", namely severe and emasculating moral conscious- and one of its solemn consequences where delirious feeling of overwhelming guilt." (p.45)

Lakhdar concluded that for a good reason the *sira* literature couldn't suppress the fact that Mohammad was easily irritated, aggressive and oftentimes daydreamer. "This sequence of shocks and traumas shaped Mohammad's mentality and personality, revolted him and prepared him for psychological disorders, from breakdown depressions to schizophrenia through compulsive obsessive neurosis, that personified in the severe and extensive rituals that he forced on himself and his followers (*ummah*.)" Lakhdar continues, "it is not unlikely that this excruciating psychological anguish [that Mohammad endured] finds its echoes and imaginations of painful agony of the fire of Hell." (p.45) Lakhdar dedicates the rest of the book to affirming this hypothesis by broaching different aspects of raving and hallucinating personalities.

Lakhdar serialized all his works online (on the website Al-Awan and Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin) to ensure their reach and maximize their circulation among the new generation who will be dedicated to online sources. What he set himself to do was unlike others. Most of reformists' and liberal Islamists' efforts were designed to tamp down fundamentalist passion for the sake of a sustainable, incremental progress. Lakhdar wanted something else that leads to a total disengagement from Islamic sacred texts. He believed that reforming Islam "requires no text"; by that he meant that the prescriptions and references that the *Quran* and the *Hadith* provide are invalid or at least insufficient since they only offer limited repertoire for (today's) reforms.

Lakhdar devoted a huge portion of his philosophy to leaders. Except for his very first Marxist writings, he invariably wrote for decision makers, policy officials and elites in general as well as to students. In the opening of his work *Why Reforming Islam* he writes:

"For readers and policy makers. At the beginning of the twentieth century the choice was either reform or revolution. At the beginning of the twenty first century the choices became either *Islah* or *fawdah* (reform or chaos) the way Somalia is. Europe had made the choice of reforms and undermined the way for chaos."[410]

[410] al-'Affif al-Akhḍar, *Iṣlāḥ al-Islām : bi-dirāsatihi wa-tadrīsihi bi-'ulūm al-adyān.*

Lakhdar was rattled by Arab leaders' weariness and dispassion to bring about the necessary reforms to fend off chaos. Except for Bourgibah, who was inspired by Ataturk's example, Lakhdar was desensitized about the mechanisms behind Arab leaders and their delirious decision-making. Bullied by ignorant populations, Lakhdar explained, Arab leaders resort to "delirious reactions" that derive from "lack of courage and prudence." The inner Marx slumbering in his soul stirred when asked about the priorities of the Arab world. "Ignorance had never helped anybody yet," reiterating Marx, "how can one explain the frivolity of Saddam Hussain's decision to invade Kuwait? Saddam took his inspiration from a dream he had to occupy Kuwait." The same logic applies to Nassir's "tragic decision to ask the UN forces to evacuate the Canal area in 1967, which triggered the war." The same happened to "Hassan Nassrallah when he decided to kidnap three Israeli soldiers." Lakhdar concludes from these examples and many other episodes that bad decision-making is "made possible not only by whims but also by raving."[411]

Arab leaders are viewed as coward, hesitant, and anemic. Unfettered by death threats, Lakhdar nudged them to throw away the obsolete policy of containment toward the Muslim Brotherhood and instead adopt a more vigorous policy of disengagement. Saving Muslims from the Islam of Medina saves lives, Lakhdar advised. It is only by embedding the Islam of Mecca in schools curricula that Arab leaders can root a "culture of life." The Islam of Medina should be shelved in Arab nations' archives. The division between the Islam of Madina and the Islam of Mecca, Mohammad of Madina and Mohammad of Mecca, confused many observers of Islamic world but for Lakhdar the distinctiveness remains necessary and dispensable. "Hegel (1770-1831) hesitated as to how he should classify Islam in the spectrum of ancient and modern religions. The reason for his hesitation was that he found in spiritual, non-violent, Meccan Islam a reason to classify it as a modern religion. But he also found in legalistic, jihadist, Madinan Islam a reason to categorize it as an ancient religion. However, due to his limited knowledge of the violent legal category of *al-walā' wal-barā'* ('Loyalty and Repudiation'), and being carried away by his philosophical assumption that those who come later in time must be more modern than those who come earlier, he shed his hesitation and said: "Let us classify it as a modern religion like Christianity."[412] Arab leaders treat

[411] al-'Affif al-Akhḍar.
[412] Ibid.

social and economical life as battlefield, armor themselves up and wall themselves off to new information and data.[413]

Conclusion

The life and intellectual arc of Lakhdar repudiates many conventions about Arab intellectual history. First, the instinctive inclination to think of Arab thought as originating in the Arab land, at the core of the Middle East, is outdated. The case of Lakhdar, whose main output was generated in Paris, stands as a rebuttal to this perception. Second, the connection between religion and poverty is not inevitable; the socialist convention is that deprived and disadvantaged individuals embrace religion for the sake of protection and as a source of solace is not always and invariable valid argument. Lakhdar's life defies this rule and offers a clear example that poverty would also lead to un-theological lifestyle. Lastly, secular thought and secularism were developed not necessarily against Islam but in the immediate context of the post-colonial condition. Lakhdar secularism emerged as a new agenda against his own past, poverty, tradition, and rural circumstances. Though known for his secularism, Lakhdar failed to pin down a clear definition of what he meant by the secular. In his writings, however, Lakhdar articulated the secular negatively, namely, what it is not. Secularism, as embodied in his life, stands against rural traditions, leaders irrationalism, and public conservatism.

Though revolutionary, Lakhdar remained within the framework of his generation. He proposed new ways to treat the sacred by sorting out the rational from the irrational, truth from myths in Islamic Turāth. As we will see next, despite his courageous call to do away with some of the most problematic Quranic verses, his thinking was confined by the reform model. Now we will turn to another Tunisian writer, whose writings proposed to problematizes the reform model, raising question on who benefits from this reform agenda.

[413] Munim Sirry, *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). See "Friendship with the Unbeliever." P. 182-193.

CHAPTER VI: YOUNG RADICAL: RAJA BEN SLAMA AND THE NEW ARAB WOMEN FACING THE TURĀTH

By Spring 2016, six of the founding members of the *Arab Rationalist Association* who had convened in 2002 in Jūrj Ṭarābīshī's apartment in Paris had passed away. With their departure, Arkoun, Ṭarābīshī, Abu Zayd, Lafif Lakhdar, Al-ʿAzm, and Shakir Nabulsi, left behind a massive body of writings that laid the foundation for the advent of a radical new generation of scholars.[414] The second generation of the post-colonial Arab state was born during the post-1967 era, two decades after the end of WWII. They took the writings of the previous generation as a starting point for protesting against what they perceived as "the skewed and unhealthy relationships" between contemporary Arabic speakers and the Turāth.

Over the course of the last two decades of the twentieth century, the first generation of the post-colonial state were able to carve out a space where they had the freedom necessary to write and think critically despite a stringent censorship policy that many Arab states placed on publications, translations, and journalism.[415] Most significantly they made a remarkable headway in the direction of establishing new perceptions and understandings that gave shape to new morals, commitments, and philosophical assumptions of the ensuing generation.[416] In particular, it was the laborious work of crafting a new conceptualization of the Turāth that left a lasting impact on the younger generation. This was made, as we have seen in previous chapters, by challenging common readings of the Turāth and reordering the past to give voice and presence to the many absences and silences in Arab history. The quest to recast Arab collective memory facilitated a new reading of Arab history and the exploration of questions of amnesia in contemporary Arab culture. Despite this original work the older generation of Arkoun and his disciples

414 For a full list of the first generation's members of the Arab Rationalist Association see Wael Sawah, "'Ashar Sanaūat Wal-Sūʿal Yatakarr: Jadal al-Dimocratiyya Wal-ʿIlmaniyya.," in *Al-Awan*. April 27, 2017. (After a Decade and the Same question keeps pressing: The Dialects between Democracy and Secularity).

415 Brian Whitaker, *What's Really Wrong with the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2009).

416 On the differences between the two generations see: Shawqi Bin Hassan, "Jurj Tarabishi: Mughamarat Taḥrir al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi," *alaraby.co.uk*, March 18, 2016. (Tarabishi: The Adventure to Liberate Arab Reason.)

were severely criticized for veering away from politics and focusing merely on "plumping the cultural domain."[417] Their engagement with the cultural field, it must be added, emanates from their conviction that the way history is told and memorized not only shapes choices made by individuals but also configures the contours of community, creed and faith. In other words, political change can no longer be effective unless predicated on and preceded by arduous cultural work. namely, culture trumps economy, Freud trumps Marx (see chapter IV.)

As the cohort of the founding fathers petered out, a new generation of young intellectuals, who had been weaned on their translations and writings, came to the fore as the new leaders of the *Association*. This group of young scholars had a propensity for the radical, reading poststructuralists like Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan. Unlike their predecessors, who read Marx and Sartre growing up, the young radicals seemed less concerned with class revolution, the disappearance of the Arab bourgeoisie, nationalism and independence. Instead they focused on issues of subjectivity, womanhood, difference, and violence. Growing up under relatively secular but autocratic regimes, they viewed the (Islamic) opposition with suspicion and dread more than they feared the repressive incumbent regimes. They were in no position to yield power and authority to the traditionalists.[418] Insisting on their right to be culturally different, they took pride in engaging the theological field and in defying ubiquitous theological interpretations.[419] In fact, the engagement of young radicals with the theological field became the new norm, an unimaginable pursuit only a few decades ago.

Assertive and defiant, these young radicals emerged most visibly in the decade that preceded the Arab Spring, a decade that saw many sit-ins, street protests and demonstrations in many cities around the

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[417] Yāsīn Ḥājj Ṣāliḥ. *Al-Thaqāfah Ka-Siyāsah: Al-Muthaqqafūn Wa-Masʾūlīyatuhum Al-Ijtimāʿīyah Fī Zaman Al-Ghalayan* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 2016).

[418] I use the term traditionalists carefully. This is the word the members of the Arab Rationalist Association used to refer to the protagonists of the Turath. It was used interchangeably with the other word Turathists (al-Turathiyyun). This is a group of intellectuals who called for a return to the Turath to find a different, more organic and authentic model than the state-sanctioned modernity.

[419] Bin Slama, one of these young radicals who propagates what she calls "philosophy of difference" and speaking from the position of a female, wrote "There are different ways of being a Muslim, above all there is the possibility to be a Muslim without being Muslim, the way Derrida was a non-Jew Jew. That means that he no longer disavowed his Jewish roots but his thought was not bounded by a Jewish framework." See Rajāʾ Bin Salāmah. *Fī Naqd Insān Al-Jamūʿ*. al-Ṭabʿah 1, Mufakkir Al-ʿArabī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 2008), 123.

Arab World. The protests they organized, however, played into the hands of their foes (the Traditionalists.) In late 2010, as scattered strikes escalated into full-fledged revolutions, ending an era in Arab politics, these young radicals saw their dreams come true, though only briefly and for a short time. With the beginning of the Arab Revolutions, the Arab world ushered in a new era that initially sparked hope and excitement but wound up dampening the mood and expectations. Except in Tunisia, the Arab Spring left a bleak sociopolitical landscape in its wake, with little hope for real change. As many observers of the Arab Middle East and North Africa have recently attested, the Revolutions in the Arab World ended up bringing "Islamists more influence and power than they had ever enjoyed before."[420] The growing power and reception of so-called "mainstream Islam" [421] stood at the center of the young radicals' concerns, as they grew less tolerant of traditionalists.

One expression of this newfound radicalism of the young generation is captured in the subtle shifts in their language. The transition from demanding "freedom of belief," to the insistence on "freedom of consciousness" is an emblematic example. Though for many, the differences between the two principles remain hardly discernable, they are crucial to the young radicals. While the first principle (freedom of belief) is designed to secure individuals a free choice of belief (Islam, Christianity or Judaism,) the second is much more radical, since it guarantees individuals the freedom of embracing any religious belief or non-belief (atheism, Gnosticism). This shift indicates only the beginning of their departure with the previous generation, whose strategy was-- at best-- to try to contain and reverse the authority of traditionalists, rather than defying them.

Unsatisfied with the historical strategy of their predecessors, young radicals designed a different approach towards Islamists, the Turāth and its protagonists. Rather than face down Islamists on al-Jazeera or in public squares,[422] the younger generation preferred to engage the frame of reference that fuels

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[420] Olivier Roy, "Political Islam After the Arab Spring." In *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 96, Number 6. November 2017. P. 128.
[421] The idea of *mainstream Islam* introduced recently by Shadi Hamid and William McCants. It excludes extremist groups and refers to those Islamic parties that "operate within the confines of institutional politics and are willing to work within existing state structures, even ostensibly secular ones." See the introduction in Shadi Hamid and William McCants, eds., *Rethinking Political Islam*, 1 edition (New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[422] See for example Raymond William Baker, *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Islamists and traditionalists' discourse. Following the ideas put forward by the post-structural school, young radicals' primary point of departure was that Islam constitutes a discursive tradition that enables not only different modes of religiosity but *also* non-religiosity. They infused their writings with this kind of radicalism that aimed at unmooring current cultural institutions, upsetting faith.They worked to disrupt national myths that creatda sense of belonging and attachment for millions of pious men and women who uncritically embraced their religion, cultural icons, and national ethos. What makes this group so distinctive is their appropriation of new styles of reasoning and new forms of knowledge and persuasion, which endow their writings with an irreducible sense of radicalism.

Rajāʾ Bin Salāmah (henceforth Slama) counts among the youngest scholars of the team. She was the first to propound Derrida's ideas in Arabic to establish the right for women difference She referred to the unarticulated history of women in Islam as "Muted Rhetoric" *Ṣamt al-Bayyan*.[423] Slama was designated to take a leading role early on when appointed as the first chief-editor of the openly secular website al-Awan in 2007. A woman full of secular passion, with a resolute willingness to state what others understood but declined to express, Slama is credited for tweaking the conversation on the secular by tying it directly to women bodies. In the contemporary Arab world, she explains, "it is politically correct to talk about secularism in general, but one could cross the line when he talks on secularism with regard to women bodies or their Hijab."[424] At its core, Slama's project takes issue with the prevailing cultural parameters and taxonomies, or with what is permissible and what is not. Slama demonstrates that it is insufficient to raise questions on how lines are being drawn in Arab culture to investigate the say*able* and the unsayable. This had been the project of the preceding generation. More pertinent to her project now is to show how these lines, most often drawn by men, exclude "women."

Though hardly apolitical, Slama shied away from the ideological labyrinth that trapped Arab intellectuals for generations. Like many of her associates, Slama felt under no obligation to yet again

[423] translated also as Paralyzing, *Ṣamt al-Bayyan* is the title of one of her early books, see: Raja Ben Slama. *Ṣamt al-Bayyan.* Cairo, al-Majlis al-Aʿlah, 1999.

[424] See the preface to one of her students' book in Āminah Waslātī. *al-Marʾah wa-al-mashrūʿ al-ḥadāthī fī fikr al-Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād* (Ṣafāqis : Ṣāmid lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2012). P.7-8.

engage the trope of reform (Iṣlaḥ) that had marked Arab thought since the *nahḍa*.[425] In fact, she positioned herself against the *Iṣlaḥ* movement, a positioning from which her radicalism unfolded. Rather than call for "reconstructing a dead tradition," Slama insisted "on deconstruction" in order broaden the intellectual field with new horizons and research possibilities. For Slama, Deconstruction meat plumbing the depths of the social and political problems that hobble Arab societies, namely digging up the root *textuality* that underpins morality, community, and emotions. Arab society, Slama maintains, does not only suffer high rates of unemployment, education, lack of decent housing, health care, soaring poverty and a gruesomely crumbling infrastructure, real problems that Arab governments miserably failed to address. Beside these challenges, however, another set of problems seems to elude intellectual scrutiny, namely the unaccounted for sexual harassment, early marriage, women's inferior social position, and the many entrenched attitudes of men's virility that inform their approach toward the Other (women.) As far as Slama is concerned, these are not purely political issues but cultural challenges that warrant further investigation. The antidote for the current social ills and political crisis is not to be found in the replacement of one political regime with another (especially one which might turn out to be more conservative.) In a rebuke to many critics who dismissed the project of the *Association'*s cultural agenda as aprimarily educational project, Slama demonstrated that ingrained cultural attitudes toward women, for instance, cannot be reduced to or dismissed as mere political issues. Eliminating legal barriers might be helpful and necessary to establishing gender equality, Slama argues, but women's parity with men cannot be reached through political legislation. According to Slama, genuine change requires an intellectual effort that would spur a grass-roots effort to shift norms. If political legislations were the only means to address Arab women's inferiority then why, asks Slama, did the many legislations that banned female genital mutilation failed to quash this activity? Ending the practice that gives women the same legal status as minors, Slama holds, must go hand in hand with a shift in embedded cultural orientations.[426]

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[425] In a departure with the literature that portrayed the Nahda as a reform project, Makdisi shows that it included a stream of thought that was irreducibly radical. See: Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914*, The California World History Library 13 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

[426] "*Who Murdered Dalal*?" in Bin Slama. *Naqd al-thawābit : ārāʾ fī al-ʿunf wa-al-tamyīz wa-al-muṣādarah* (Beirut: Rabitat al-ʿAqlaniyin al-Arab, 2005), 106-113.

To advance the cause of gender equality, Slama takes a genealogical approach that begins with the far past or the Turāth. Praising this approach as the most efficient, Slama explained that genealogy meant to excavate the conditions that made women's inequality with men more acceptable or natural. For Slama, the preceding generation of Arab intellectuals was held captive to the idea of historicizing as a means to *invalidate* the textuality of the Turāth. While conceding that this was a good start in the right direction, she nonetheless added that historicizing is inadequate for meeting the challenges in Arab society. The strategy she lays out for herself is to *denaturalize* this embedded inequality by turning to study the Turāth, not only to historicize it, but also to defamiliarize this lopsidedness between women and men. In her writings, Slama pays tribute to the pioneering works of the well-known Moroccan feminist and historian Fatma al-Mernissi (1940-2015) for blazing a trail in the direction of establishing the unwritten "Islamic women history," but Slama deploys Derrida's concepts on the Turāth more efficiently. One should recall, however, that Mernissi's exploration of the Turāth remains foundational in its disruption of gendered roles and spaces. Al-Mernissi's idea of "engineered sexual relations," for example, gained much popularity in the Arab feminist movement.[427] Yet, while al-Mernissi's generation is well studied, very little scholarship had addressed Slama's generation of Arab women feminists.

Like al-Mernissi, Slama suggests that not only historical but also literary approaches informed by psychoanalysis can shed light on less celebratory aspects of the Turāth. The texts of the Turāth are not innocuous or objective, writes Slama. She insists that only by uncovering the harm (pain) and revealing the (symbolic) violence these out-dated texts incur on modern Muslims, can one address the Turāth. For Slama, the textuality of the Turāth is not neutral but deeply biased, since it enables certain views and disables others, affirms one way of seeing while precluding others. The Turāth enforces an assortment of ethics, conducts, modes of behavior and mores while remaining silent on the flagrant discrimination against women's bodies in society. In her writings, she recounts the unattended violence that these obsolete texts facilitate.

[427] Bin Slama, "Wadaʿn Fatima Al-Marnisis," *Al-Awan* (blog), November 30, 2015, https://www.alawan.org/2015/11/30/

The transition from historicizing the Turāth to revealing the violence and pain it inflicts on women's bodies and on other vulnerable sectors of society captures the main shift in the generational gap between young radicals and their predecessors. Rather than struggle to relegate the Turāth to the past, young radicals portrayed the Turāth, itself, as a problem of the past that spelled trouble in the present.According to Slama, the Turāth is a problematic of the past that carried over into the present because modern day Arab intellectuals failed to lay the past to rest and "mourn over it."[428] Borrowing the idea from Sigmund Freud, Slama argues that mourning is essential for Arab societies to transcending the past.[429] Slama shows that the roots of the Turāth are poisonous and spread pain throughout the social body, not least of all the most vulnerable parts of Arab society. Therefore, Slama warns, it is indispensable that "We take a decision regarding our heritage"[430] before embarking on any political change. What is the decision for which she advocates? What does it look like? What is her evidence and justifications?

While Slama writes on a diverse range of topics and engages internal political debates in contemporary Tunisia, this chapter addresses the three issues in her writings designed to encounter the collective slide toward the Turāth. First, her invocation of the muted violence [*al-ʿunf al-hadiʾ*] generated by Islamic laws. Second, her proposals to transform the *relation* between the sacred and profane domains in Arab culture. And third, her prescription for a wholesale reorganization of former history based on the invention and re-imagination of new interpretive ties or *ʿAlaqah Taʾwiliyyah*, which give rise to new "hermeneutical connections" with past historical events.[431]

The three themes of muted violence, the Turāth, and alternative history made up the core of Slama's intellectual project. Slama interlaced these themes in her work on creative writing, romance in Islam, Sunni modes of mourning, death rituals, and the Shariʿa. She explored the fluid relations between

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[428] Slama developed the idea of modernity as mourning over the past (see below in the chapter.) She appropriated this idea from Sigmund Freud's Melancholia and Mourning. See her article "*Al-Ḥadāthah wal- Hiddad*" in Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, ed., *Al-Ḥadāthah Wa-Al-ḥadāthah Al-ʿArabīyah: Muʾtamar Ishhār Al-Muaʾssasah Al-ʿArabīyah Lil-Taḥdīth Al-Fikrī, Muhdá Ilá Idwārd Saʿīd, 30 Nīsān/Ibrīl - 2 Ayyār/Māyū 2004*, al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Damascus: Dār Bitrā, 2005).

[429] Rajāʾ Bin Slama. *Bunyān al-Fuḥūlah : Abḥāth al-Mudhakkar wa-al-Muʾannath* (Damascus, Syria: Dar Bitra lil-Nashir, 2005), 143.

[430] Rajāʾ Bin Slama. *Fī Naqd Insān Al-Jamū*ʿ. al-Ṭabʿah 1, Mufakkir Al-ʿArabī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 2008), 15.

[431] For a counterpoint to Slama's secular and hermeneutical approach to the Turath see: Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (March 20, 2006): 323–47.

Huddud and romance, the formation of the Shariʿa and the emergence of diverse styles of mourning, and the rise of Umma, which facilitated a new style of being. This chapter explores how the second generation of post-colonial Arab writers expressed their anxieties and concerns over Islamic history, individual freedoms, subjectivity, and the Turāth through the writings of Slama. In what follows I will not limit the scope of the interrogation to the ways Slama's generation embodies new ideals and commitments which break with previous generations of intellectuals. The main intent is to explore Slama's strategies for coping with the Turāth. What are the frameworks she fashions to make possible the emergence of a distinctive Arab subjectivity? What kind of violence does current Islamic normativity sustain? Before exploring these questions, a note on the historiography is in order.

Historiography

The second generation of the post-colonial Arab state rarely figures in the current scholarship on the Arab world. Born in the post-1967 era, this generation came of age in the late 1990s (Slama's first work, for instance, was a dissertation written in 1999.) Their writings were infused with the unrelenting battle against the past's awakening. Unlike their predecessors, who thought of the Turāth as dead, this generation grew up wrestling with the Turāth. Since the late 1970s, following the perceptible disenchantment with the Arab national state and its miscarried modernist projects, many turned to the past in search of alternative models. The "return to the roots" was and still is at the center of the current intellectual and public debates in the Arab world. Nothing in this debate is particularly unique to the Arab region, since many Western and non-Western societies witnessed an analogous appeal toward their authenticity and undead past.[432] Yet, within the Arab world the debate on the Turāth prompted a cultural war between those who advocated a return to the Turāth on the grounds that it could offer a way out of the current crisis that paralyze Arab societies, and those who deemed the call to resort to the Turāth a giant step backward. Curiously, the fresh controversy around the Turāth that began in the 1970s was glossed over and reduced to the perennial debate between Islamists and secularists, dulling the critical edge and novelty of these recent debates.

[432] Gideon Rose, "The Undead Past," *Foreign Affairs*, December 12, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2017-12-12/undead-past.

The controversy over the Turāth disrupted the rigid intellectual identities (Left v. Right, Islam v. modern), precipitating new questions on who is a progressive in the Arab world today. In the wake of the Turāth debate, the old familiar division between secular and Islamic grew increasingly obsolete and irrelevant. This is because the current intellectual exchange of the last three decades is no longer between Western-oriented scholars and conservative Islamists, though the Turāth debate has been mistakenly portrayed this way. Rather, the dispute over the Turāth takes place exclusively among "modernist" scholars, namely intellectuals informed by western philosophical and literary tastes. This is to say that the debate over the Turāth reflects the ongoing cultural war *within* the so-called liberal camp rather than outside of it.[433] More concretely, it is a cultural war between the many intellectuals affiliated with the Center for Arab Unity Studies and the few affiliated with the *Arab Rationalist Association*. While both of these groups viewed conservative Islamists with suspicion, their ideas diverged on the status of the Turāth and the meaning of authenticity. (see chapter I and II)

Current intellectual historiography has been astonishingly silent on these debates. Very few scholars endeavored to explain the new intellectual trends in the region. One can only speculate that behind this disregard lies the fact that the center of the culture war on the Turāth is not the Eastern Mediterranean but North Africa.[434] Yet, intellectual history should afford a broader view of the full range of the individuals who articulate ideas, the institutions that disseminate this knowledge, and the people who read about these ideas. However, current Arab intellectual history falls short in this regard, and remains transfixed on the interrogations of the *nahḍa*, which restrict and limit the scope of Arab intellectual explorations. Very few works of intellectual history have questioned the geography of this frame.[435]

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[433] Unaware of the new fault lines among current Arab scholars, many historians and sociologists have confused and lumped them together. See, for example: Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[434] The Francophone culture was contrasted with the Turath in countries like Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. The public controversy on school curriculum and the use of the French language were only two examples of the raging cultural war in North Africa.

[435] Hamzah Dyala, "The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, Public Sphere and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood (Hardback) - Routledge," Text, Routledge.com, accessed December 17, 2017, https://www.routledge.com/The-Making-of-the-Arab-Intellectual-Empire-Public-Sphere-and-the-Colonial/Hamzah/p/book/9780415488341; Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914*; Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership, 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316584521.

The *nahḍa* framework continues to inform the way in which Arab thought is examined by scholars. Even the so called post-colonial Arab thought is subjected to the *nahḍa* framework, resulting in many misconceptions along the way. Viewing the current cultural war on the Turāth through the lens of the *nahḍa* leaves many blind spots in accounting for new trends in Arab intellectual history. This is, among other reasons. why North Africa, slowly becoming the center of Arab intellectual gravity , still remains neglected. The Turāth remains another blind spot in the historiography of the Middle East because of this inherently subjective approach that governs (and plagues) many written intellectual histories of the Arab world, which focused primarily on the Levant and Egypt, the traditional centers of literature and thought since the nineteenth century. Even recent works made little effort to correct this entrenched imbalance in the field.[436] Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss's otherwise excellent work lays claim to rewriting a new intellectual history "beyond the liberal age" but also fails to include the traditionally marginal region of North Africa in its comprehensive reappraisal of Arab intellectual history, as one critic rightly pointed out.[437] The historical gap is still awaiting for more historical research.

One of the tragic consequences of this unconscious omitting of the spirited intellectual debates in North Africa is not only the fragmentation of the unity of Arab thought between important centers and irrelevant margins, but also the absence of the thrust that new debates facilitate. The new terminology and idioms that gained currency among a growing circle of young Arab intellectuals in North Africa remain out of reach for readers of Arab intellectual history and constantly confuse Middle Eastern historians. The most significant example is the recent reactions to the writings of Kamel Daoud, Bin Slāma, Hamīd Zināz, and Said Nashīd. These intellectuals represent a group of progressive writers, for they engage in writings not only on Turāth, but also on the construction of faith, sexuality, and the formation of identity. They conceive themselves as progressive not because they call for a revolution, but primarily because they perceive themselves as culturally transgressive. Kamel Daoud, whose writings invoked much talk in the West, is a good example to reckon with.

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[436] Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[437] Idriss Jebari, "Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda," *Global Intellectual History* 0, no. 0 (2017): 1–8.

When Algerian author and columnist Kamel Daoud published an article in 2015 elaborating on "the sexual misery of the Arab world" he created a commotion a and confused his readers. Daoud's widely read articles in the New York Times complimented his previous writings, which reflected his anger and disenchantment with the contemporary Arab world, where young writers are sacrificed on the altars of the national agenda or conservative Islam. Yet, his scathing criticism of the "rotted values" in Arab culture led to a deluge of denunciation and reproof from Western writers (with post-colonial sensibilities) and academics who accused him of indulging in "Oriental clichés." Can these writings, which Daoud represents, be reduced to orientalism? Only those few scholars with a nuanced understanding of current Arab debates and a contextualized sense of the cultural war raging in North Africa could grasp the positionality from which Daoud speaks. In fact, the articles Daoud published in Le Mond and the New York Times were not unique in their tone but reflected a broader sensibility among the second generation of post-colonial Arabs.

This chapter addresses the new cultural sensibilities that this generation developed. Rather than brushing aside their talk as a rehashing of Orientalist stereotypes, or dismissing them as self-hating intellectuals, to the purpose of this chapter is to understand who gets deemed progressive in the current Arab intellectual landscape and why. By interrogating the ways these writers forged their narratives about current Arab political culture, women, violence, sexuality and gender, one can cull some understanding of what it takes to be a progressive. Current historiography has yet to address these questions. By looking into the writing of Daoud's colleague, Bin Slama, I will interrogate the politics this generation valorized and inquire what it means to be progressive in the Arab world today? It is through this widening of the scope of Arab intellectual history to include the exciting discussions unfolding in North Africa, that the rigid boundaries of the historiographical field are being revisited and revised.

Illegitimate Pain

The young radicals approached the cultural war on the Turāth equipped with different terminology, focusing on addressing more obscure aspects of Arab and Islamic history, while opting for less trodden paths into this history. This group of radicals was less concerned with the question that had long harangued Arab intellectuals: what should they re-adopt from the Turāth and what should they toss away? Nor they

were consumed by the almost inevitable clash between ideals of Islamic governance and the practical difficulty of applying them. The young radicals were trying to break with these questions and the intellectual tradition that attempted to reconcile the Turāth with modernity. Theirs is a protest against this mode of intellectual conversation and framework.

Fundamentally, the young radicals questioned the value of the Turāth, a questioning informed by their exasperation over the "relapse to the Turath."[438] What does it mean to turn to the Turāth at the end of the twentieth century? To what ends? What positionalities and cultural implications are re-affirmed through the Turāth? what was excluded in the process? How does the turn to the Turāth enhance the status of historical truth and truth order? And above all, what cultural and social possibilities does relapse to the Turāth open up? Examining these questions, Slama invites her readers to think about the Turāth as a cultural framework and a set of cultural references that inflict illegitimate pain on the formation of women's subjectivity in the Arab world. Latching onto certain truth regimes facilitated by the Turāth framework comes at the expense of women's demand for equality. For Slama, it merits asking, who's interests are being served by the continuing emphasis on the Turāth? Who benefits and at what price? For Slama, the answer is clearly men. Not the Arab man in general, but those who appropriate the Turāth to justify and consecrate the status quo.

Slama's explorations of illegitimate pain emerges from these questions. The idea of illegitimate pain offers new intellectual possibilities for understanding the delirious impact of the Turāth and current Islamic modes of religiosity on the construction of women's subjectivity. In so doing Slama charts a new course that problematizes more than it provides answers. As she embarks on this debate, Slama differentiates between two types of pain: the natural and unnatural pains. Her interest lies in the latter category for it is a man-made, artificial pain that shall be avoided. In fact, Slama approaches the topic by posting probing questions. She asks how one proceeds to write a history of pain. How does one account for an elusive and intangible phenomenon like pain? In what ways do the current commitments to religion

[438] The "relapse to the Turath" is the translation of the frame al-Nukus 'ila al- *Turāth* coined and employed by Ṭarābīshī over the two decades starting in 1990. See his works *Al-Muthaqqafūn Al-ʿArab Wa-Al-Turāth: Al-Taḥlīl Al-Nafsī Li-ʿUṣāb Jamāʿī* (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 1991); See also the collections of article in Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. *Min Al-Nahḍah 'Ilá Al-Riddah: Tamazzuqāt Al-Thaqāfah Al-ʿArabīyah Fī ʿAṣr Al-*ʿA*wlamah*. Al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2000).

generate and sustain illegitimate pain? These questions haunt Slama and define her method and approach in exploring Arab and Islamic history.[439] For Slama the challenge of accounting for illegitimate pain emanates from the fact that the conventional methods through which religion and the Turāth are being interrogated preclude any exploration that make ideas of individual pain thinkable.

Slama sets to question the Turāth and the ways it gives rise to current Islamic forms through which violence occurs.[440] Current modes of Islamic religiosity, Slama argues, inflict pain by normalizing outdated social categories and conceptions, and by making legitimate non-operational judgments which all combined to perpetuate the secondary status of certain groups in Arab society. Rather than striving to obliterating social differences between men and women, these categories work to order society hierarchically and along patriarchal lines. This inherently prejudicial social ordering that finds its authority and legitimacy in the Turāth excludes ethnic groups (Christians,) labels others as inferior (women), and externalizes yet others (seculars). However, the pain this system inflicts on woman seems to carry no weight in the eyes of many Arab intellectuals, who seem oblivious to the pain and sufferingthat the Turāth wreaks on women and blocks the formation of their subjectivity. This is because the forms of suffering the Turāth produces are not legible for many Arab men who continue to deny the benefits of a psychoanalysis that opens windows into the internal life of Arab women. The mere focus on the external aspect of society (political, social and economic), rather than venturing a peek into the internal side (culture, values), results in propping up the status quo and denies women the equality they yearn for for.[441]

Slama calls this pain "illegitimate pain" [*al-ʾAlam al-la* Mashruʿ] since it is not visited upon women by nature or produced by the human condition, a pain triggered by natural death, separation, or illness. The illegitimate pain is a product of artificial rules, cultural agreements, and ingrained values which are concealed within larger masculine systems. While the Islamic belief system, like any belief system, produces "hurt, hegemony, and discrimination among believers," these injurious fallouts are not

[439] See Slama explains her approach on pain in Rajā Bin Slama, "ḥiwar Maftuḥ ḥawla Naqd al-ʿunf al-la-Mashruʿ," in *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*. January 26, 2014, http://www.ahewar.org/debat/s.asp?aid=397751.
[440] Bin Slama. *Bunyān al-fuḥūlah: Abḥāth al-Mudhakkar wa-al-Muʿannath*. Damascus, Dar Bitra lil-Nashir. pp. 104.
[441] "Frūīd wal-Arab" in Bin Slama, *Fī Naqd Insān Al-Jamūʿ*. al-Ṭabʿah 1, Mufakkir Al-ʿArabī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 2008), 156–163.

"distributed evenly" between all sections of society. The mechanisms of the Islamic tradition are not neutral but authorize certain positions and attitudes, and validate certain customs that all seem to play down and impede women's equality in society. Unfortunately, Arab women have assimilated these rules, a result of centuries of indoctrination, and they keep reproducing them.[442]

Yet there exists a different kind of illegitimate pain that Islamic movements and fundamentalists aggravate using the Turāth: the violence of Islamic law (Shariʿa) that no longer resolves people's problems but tanle them up. The Shariʿa, Slama maintains, accelerates and confounds questions of identity rather than alleviate them.[443] Since these "medieval laws" are "silent" on modernity demands and "incongruent" with modern sensibilities like equality, freedoms and individual dignity, they spell trouble for the formation of Arab women's identity and women's development as independent subjects. Rejecting to recognize that the "pain sources" are integral to the Shariʿa corpus, Slama reasons, precludes the adoption of human rights in the Arab World. However, Slama argues that Arab regimes' reservations and misgivings toward fully embracing enactments of Human Rights, reservations articulated by pretenses of cultural particularities, take their cues from the Shariʿa. So long as the pain sources continue to be untapped and unmapped, the Shariʿa will reign supreme. It is precisely because certain pain is not recognized in and of itself, that social and political change is stunted and imperiled in current Arab societies. For only with the appreciation of the adverse effects of the pain that the Turāth perpetrates and generates, can the prospects for change become real. New realities unfurl with this recognition and with awareness of the harms and damages produced by current systems (textuality, public memory, and the Turāth).

Exploring the illegitimate pain opens a window for Slama to expand the scope of her evaluation of the Turāth, or what she calls the obsolete normative legal system that reigns intact. The conversation on the Shariʿa, as far as Slama is concerned, should not be limited to the implementation of *huddud*, or what *huddud* should be followed or tossed out. This approach leads nowhere, since it is restricting the

[442] Bin Slama, 106.

[443] A similar suggestion of the impossibility of the application of the Shariʿa laws was proposed by Islamic legal historian Wael Hallaq but from a different perspective. Hallaq's Arabic translation is a bestseller in the Arab world. See Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*, Reprint edition (Columbia University Press, 2012).

field of investigation to legal codes without studying the insidious political, social and psychological harms that this framework sustains. For Slama, the conversation on the Shariʿa should look beyond the Islamic meanings of these rules and consider the ways in which the Shariʿa discourse precludes the emergence of new categories (freedom), concepts (equality), and understandings essential for the initiation of Arab societies into the 21st century. Most significantly, she points to the diverse ways in which the current understanding of Shariʿa laws hinder the integration of alternative value systems, namely human rights, into society. A staunch believer in unity of human beings and their universal values, or what she calls "human oneness," Slama argues that "what commonalities humans share are superior to whatever sets them apart." The idea that she conveys here is not only to water down the guiding principles of the Shariʿa, but also to assert that humanity comes first and religiosity comes after.[444]

One salient aspect of a society that lives along the Turāth is what Slama calls normative regimes. "Normative regimes," Slama explains, are sites where the distance between good and evil is unbridgeable and the boundaries between these two domains are clearly drawn. They are characterized by the absence of gray areas, a space that "affords possibilities of life, art, and creativity." Normative regimes are the most obvious legacy of the Turāth that disqualify gray areas, which give momentum to the good to emerge from the evil. Evil is not invariably evil, Slama insists, nor does good remain constantly good. Good and evil are not absolutes, but relational. They are defined by space and time and subject to history. They are not rigid concepts but elastic ideas, fluid notions subject to change and evolution. The convergence between good and evil is what theological movements and traditionalist reject and detest. This immaculate rejection of the intermingling of the good and evil characterizes normative regimes where pain is most amplified and where gray areas are crossed off. Cultural productivity and creativity takes place when these two seemingly separate domains (good and evil) collapse into each other. For traditionalists, however, good is good and evil is evil, two essentials that never converge. This is how "hopes, desires, and unique needs are derailed in the Arab world," writes Slama.

[444] For an opposing view on Slama's call, especially her call to adopt Human Rights, see the scathing critique by Massad. Joseph Andoni Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015). See in particular Chapter four.

While significant dimensions of Islamic law practices have long gone, erased by the sweeping force of modernity, normative systems, which were informed by the Turāth, lingered. This is a cultural relic that deprives the evolution of new Islamic perceptions to feed new cultural norms. For Slama, cultural renewal depends on dismantling these values rather than reforming them. The reckoning with the "cultural constants" *Thawabit Thaqafiya* remains the order of the day for young radicals. The need to destabilize and dislocate these "cultural constants" that relentlessly bedevil any ambitious program for change might not be readily communicable to Western frameworks that lack categories like "cultural constants."[445] This is where Slama locates her generation's task: in naming events unnamed.

The power of this generation, Slama writes, lays not in the number of its followers but in their ability to call things out. Their power resides in their ability to problematize. "Even if we are few in numbers we enjoy the power of naming." The power to name is the most important for these young radicals for events unnamed have no meaning nor do exist as independent things. For example, Slama writes that "violence never name itself as such."[446] What she alludes to is that violence is not recognized as such as long as it is not designated with a name. Though these scholars have no major power to sway politics away from traditionalists, they are engaged in a process of conferring meaning on many cultural practices: The ability to describe historical and global events (narrativize) and explain social processes (analyze). They are the ones who indulge in conceptualizing and recounting the diverse dimensions of experiences that go unnamed.

An Unlikely Beginning

In the early 2000s, Slama's radical proclivities grew noticeable as her warnings about the dangers of Turāth fell on deaf ears. Slama began designing her message to win over the youth who faced the religious message ill prepared. The specific audience Slama turns to is Arab millennials, who share some of her anti-Turāth sensibilities. In a series of defensive articles in *al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*, Slama offered

[445] The idea of "cultural constants" appears in Slama's title "Naqd al-Thawabit" where she notes that the Arabic word *Thawabit* has no meaning in either French or English, therefore is not a translatable concept to these languages. Bin Slama. *Naqd al-thawābit : ārā' fī al-ʿunf wa-al-tamyīz wa-al-muṣādarah* (Beirut: Rabitat al-Aqlaniyin al-Arab, 2005) p. 6.
[446] Ibid. pp. 152–3.

a broad social and cultural characterizations of her generation's sensibilities that sustain and fuel their critical drive.

The young radicals belong to a generation born in the late 1960s and 1970s, and as mentioned earlier, they come of age in the late 1990s at the peak of Islamic activities in the Arab world. This group includes university lecturers, journalists, novelists, artists, and playwrights who shared a common interest in translations. An overwhelming majority of these young radicals are city dwellers. They frequent their own dingy cafes, work with a relatively few and distinct publishing houses that gave rise to similar aesthetics and literary tastes. Their shared reading list unifies their judgments and shapes their sentiments. They habitually exchange books and, curiously enough, divide up translation work among themselves. These readings and translations instilled in this group a set of moral principles and values that left a lasting effect on their writings. Though scattered between Paris, Tunis, Beirut, and Casablanca, their commitment to secularism, Human Rights, women's and minority rights, gave evidence to what Reymnd Williams called "structure of feeling."[447] Explaining this idea, one of William's students argued that structures of feeling "can and do become ideological, but at their iception are always distinct from the ideological formations to which they stand in relation."[448] As an emerging group with similar feelings, the young radicals were unified by their suspicion towards the powerful traditionalists in Arab society. Indeed, this group has some claim to being regarded as the first organized anti-Turath party in the Arab world.

The young radicals refuse to live on the fringes of society, a far cry from the isolated life-style of their predecessors. They cultivated a different set of principles that defined their concept of progress. Instead of calling for a class revolution to upend the social order, they preferred civil disobedience. Acts of disobedience were propounded by exploring the moral imperatives of cultural deviation (as opposed to cultural conformity) and theological unorthodoxy (as opposed to theological complicity.) For many of

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[447] Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature*, Marxist Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[448] "Structure of feeling are generated by specific social groups in the course of their experience of and participation in everyday social life..what distinguishes a structure of feeling is that it is emergent and provisional, not so much a fully articulated realization or achievement as one in the creative throes of becoming articulated." see: Michael Pickering. *History, Experience, and Cultural Studies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 33–35.

them, cultural and political defiance reflect the essence of humanity.[449] In a marked departure from their trainers and spiritual fathers, the young radicals abhorred the idea of Arab nationalism. In fact, Slama not only viewed the idea of pan Arabism with contempt, but also expressed open admiration of Israel and Jews' intellectual achievement.[450] Yet, very few things bind this group together as their newfound sensibilities with regard to the political possibilities of texts. They have curated language and themes to address these untold political aspects of the Turāth texts. This is reflected most vividly in the shared idioms and vocabulary that inform their writings. Though their engagement in unconventional themes like pain and violence, gender and romance, do not necessarily replace or triumph over the old intellectual engagement, but evolve from existing ones, they always expand and alter the intellectual playing field. In particular, the proposals for reading the Turāth, using post-structural tools, gives a fresh slant to this generations' sensibility towards the written word.

Slama grew up in Tunisia under Bourgibah but opened her eyes to the political world only under the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali. She spoke little of the second but admired the father of the nation whose last order was to have the words "Emancipator of Women" inscribed on his tomb. In her numerous writings, Slama curiously makes no mention of the defeat of 1967, the meta-event that informed the experience and careers of her teachers. It is not that this event escaped her writings. Rather, it indicates that the young radicals were molded by slightly different experience. Slama's generation was informed by the Black Decade (*al-ʿAshriyya al-Sudaʾ*) the decade-long civil war in Algeria between a tyrannical government and doctrinaire Islamists that began in 1991. More than four hundred Algerian intellectuals were slayed in this brutal war, Slama registers. Curiously, Slama pays tribute to these intellectuals and refers to this internal war more often than she does to the 1967 war.

Like the rest of the young radicals, Slama drew much inspiration from a new historical understanding of the Turāth based on a recent conception that views the past as a construction.[451]

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[449] On the moral necessity for cultural disobedience see: Saʿīd Nāshīd. *Al-Ikhtiyār Al-ʿilmānī Wa-Usṭūrat Al-Namūdhaj*. al-Ṭabʿah 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah lil-Ṭibāʿah wa-al-Nashr, 2010), 14.

[450] Slama expressing her ideas on an article on the reception of Sigmund Freud in the Arab world. See Rajāʾ Bin Slāma, *Fī Naqd Insān Al-Jamūʿ*. al-Ṭabʿah 1, Mufakkir Al-ʿArabī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 2008).

[451] Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995).

Psychoanalysis and post-modern theories, however, were essential building blocks in her analysis. These theories did more than open up new intellectual horizons for her and challenge current Islamic normativity. Slama's intervention in the history of women in Islam, for instance, demonstrates that many of the current Islamic principles toward women are a matter of luck and historical contingency rather than a *design*. Slama does not believe that historical facts are malleable, but she is convinced that historical narratives are easily twisted. Those young scholars like Slama who took aim at disrupting and undermining the hegemonic narratives, which happen to be Islamic, call themselves seculars. Introducing herself to a group of readers fascinated with her approach to the study of Islam, Slama writes "I approach religion through a secular and non-religious lens. I have called for [the establishment of] a new religion. Namely, building a new relation with religion in agreement with human rights and diversity."[452]

Slama does not falter on her secular identity. Secularism for her is neither foreign nor an imported ideology. It is a legacy that Tunisia's first president implanted in Tunisia ever since he reformed the *majala* of personal code in 1956. In this sense, Slama thinks of herself as a guardian of a secular national legacy that she inherited in the same manner Islamists think of themselves as custodians of Islamic inheritance (literary Turāth.) At an early age Slama developed a temperament that runs counter to the ascending Islamic moralities. In an interview to the journal Maktuob, she reminiscences, "I was admitted to the University(!) where I saw the Islamic movement first hand, which later morphed into the Ennhada [Islamic party.] I found them shutting down restaurants before us to enforce fasting during [the month of] Ramadan. I saw them hiding knives and chains in the university's mosque. I could not shape my personality nor any [style of] writing far from this violence… I grew up with the Tunisian revolution, alongside a new generation of Islamists who grew up with me. I found them taking over the regime after the revolution, trying to steer the revolution and the nation into their [Islamic] direction. I could not carry out my research on eroticism and psychoanalysis away from this renewed violence. I might have spent much of my energies and a [crucial] part of my life fretting over political Islam at the expense of [a scholarly]

[452] "Hiwar Maftuh with Raja Bin Slama." In *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*. 6 February 2011.

production in my narrow field. This might turn out to be a blunder, but this was the fate of my generation. No one can jump above history."[453]

Encountering these "infiltrating forces" intent on veering the revolution toward Islam, is the "fate of" Slama's generation. This is the cultural context in which she premises her work on the question of how to defend the hard-earned liberties, human rights values, and sensibilities that have increasingly come under assault in recent decades. Slama's treatment of this question is informed by her positionality as a *woman* and a *Francophile*. In her writings, she frets over the return of the medieval alongside Freud's return of the repressed. Slama writes that "medieval Islam" represents the repressed in current Arab culture. This insight calls to address this phenomenon rather than disregarding it (in a rebuke to Arab Marxists.) To fend off Tunisia's moderate character against the "obscurantists," she calls to "Tunisize Islamists before they Islamize Tunisia."[454]

The new explorations of Arab and Islamic Turāth, a frenzy whipped up by the promise that the Turāth could provide an untrodden path to cultural renewal, caught Slama, young radicals and other Francophiles by surprise. For them nothing looked promising in the return to the Turath, which announced the beginning of the reversing and dismantling of the hard-fought rights that Arab women wrestled with over the course of the last few decades since Tunisia's independence. Indignant and discontent, Slama and the young radicals viewed the turn toward the Turāth with suspicion, a precarious slippery slope that might awaken the repressed Islamic medieval. If Arab intellectuals would take this course, she cautioned, this will have a chilling effect on the cultural, social, and intellectual well-being of Arab society. Seculars, who formerly reviled and detested any engagements with the Turāth, found themselves goaded into that debate that they thought was behind them.

The specter of the Turāth aggravated the plight of Francophone and secular Tunisians and other young radicals around the Arab world. The return to the Turāth was carried over the ascending social

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453 Raja Bin Slama "Al-Azhar and the Oil impeded Arab modernity project" June 23, 2015. Nour al-Dinn Tayib. *Kalimat.* S.N. 2620. http://thaqafat.com/2015/06/26592

454 A few years before his death Habib Bourgibah decreed to have the two words "Women Emancipator" engraved on his tomb. As Ben Slama writes, Bourgibah's spirit swept through Tunis and careened off Islamic missions. Rajā' Ben Slama, *Al-Hijāb Wal-Mar'ah (The Hijab and Women)* (Damascus, Syria: Dār Bitrā lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2009).

powers, which was poised to unravel the entire Francophone world in the name of authenticity. The attempt to weed out all the traces of French values and eliminate all signs of modern culture left these scholars distraught. The question was how to respond to this excessively politicized use and abuse of the Turāth.

Fully convinced that a century long of intellectual exchanges with Islamists amounted to no more than a futile talk, Slama wondered whether the previous generation of intellectuals had drained their energies in their attempts to sway Islamists into reforming their understanding of the Turāth. "Have we wasted too much time arguing against Islamists? Had the argumentations against Islamists led to enough knowledge to create a new [form of] religiosity (*Tadayyun Jadīd)*? How can we practically gauge the effects of these engagements with Islamists?"[455] This is how Slama and the young radicals felt of their teachers, who sapped their energies fighting against Islamists to no avail. This disappointment with the teachers braced them for the confrontation against the protagonists of the Turāth.

Echoes of a Grim Past: Standing up to the Turāth

Slama rails against the collective tendency in the last few decades to stir the Turāth back to life. The preoccupation, or the obsession, with Islamic textuality indicates that "we have not weaned ourselves of the ties with the beginnings and origins"[456] of Arab culture. Identifying the Turāth as an elaborate system that enforces an unquestioned hierarchy and patriarchy, Slama's uneasiness arises from the fact that the Turāth enjoys unrivaled authority among ordinary citizens. Given that it is a form of life that provides a framework of formally organized collectivity, the Turāth is political. For Slama and the young radicals this form of life increases the friction with their notion of selfhood and infringes on their conceived idea of individual freedoms. Slama believes that individuals think in accordance with the collectivity and society in which they live. Everyone is born into a tradition (Turāth) that provides him with directions not only on how to behave but also on how to think and how to find meaning. The way

[455] Bin Slāma, "Hal Najnī Thimar Fashal al-Iṣlaḥ al-Dinnī?," in *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*, accessed December 6, 2017, http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=415642.
[456] Bin Slāma, *Fī Naqd Insān Al-Jamū*ʿ, 125.

individuals conceive women's bodies and sexuality, pass judgments and separate between virtue and sin, are not individual traits but learned cultural and societal values. Slama concedes that since individuality is hopelessly intertwined in culture, the deconstruction of Turāth is a political act.

In 2015 Slama took the initiative to rally Arab intellectuals to re-conceptualize the Turāth, reclaiming it from the hands of the Turāthists, and subjecting it to new scrutiny using new methodological approaches. Left to traditionalists, Slama maintained, the Turāth had been misconstrued, manipulated and squeezed into an Islamic box. In a paper that launched a conference entitled "Tunisian intellectuals against Terror," Slama took the opportunity to broach the Turāth and the value of history. Held in the capital Tunis, Slama dwelled on the enabling conditions essential to the process of history writing. In the lecture, she spoke of "the prospects for rewriting history"[457] in this time when the Arab world is roiling under the violence of the Islamic State. History writing, Slama suggested, is not invariably possible or easily accessible. Some underlying conditions should be available to trigger a comprehensive reappraisal of history. In fact, it might be "impossible" to rewrite history "except in an [unusual] historical moment which is open to all forms [of knowledge] and [radical] possibilities." The contemporary Arab world reached that point, where all possibilities are open as truth regimes are being subjected to new revisions. For Slama the unprecedented atrocities and barbarism Islamic groups committed in the name of Islam afford such a unique moment to "rearticulate the Turāth." As a psychologist, Slama recognizes that many ordinary Muslims throughout the Arab world were alarmed by the extreme groups which wreaked havoc and caused mass murder on an unprecedented scale unknown in Islamic history. The fact that many were appalled by the violent acts proved for Slama that minds and hearts are ripe for a revisionist perspective on the Turāth. A new take on the Turāth is possible "only when history is *recognized*," Slama concluded in her paper. Her call to come to terms with the Turāth was due to the promise it holds out: to relativize dogmatic assertions of immutable truths that Turāthist narratives circulate. Through contextualizing past historical events, Slama believes that history is a powerful strategy to provincialize absolute Islamic truths.

[457] Raja Bin Slama, "Mu'tamar Al-Muthaqafiyn Al-Tunissiyyin ḍid Al-'Irhab," *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*, accessed December 5, 2017.

Acting upon these principles that she previously downplayed, Slama authored a *Manifest* entitled "Our Liability toward Terror committed in the name of Islam,"[458] signed by eminent Arab writers, poets, filmmakers and artists. In this document, she delineated the principles that guide young radicals towards the unfolding political events in the Arab world. Confining the resort to the Turāth only to scholars and specialists, Slama denies and deplores the common ahistorical use of Islamic texts and corpus. "We renounce the employment [*literarily* re-enacting] of this corpus of the old texts." The fact that these texts are being abused for political expediency, enforces young radicals to instantly act. She writest "it is incumbent upon us to refute and oppose the invigoration (*tafʿil*) of this corpus and all the mechanisms that lead to its activation." Rather than resorting to the Turāth, she calls to focus on reforming the theological field in the Arab world.

A staunch secularist, Slama began calling for the forging of a new relationship of contemporary Arabs with the Turāth. Saʿīd Nashīd, her colleague in the *Association*, pointed out that the challenge of the Turāth lies in the fact that it was written in medieval times. "The conundrum of all religious texts is that they were written in a stage in which society lacked social institutions, authority lacked laws [to provide checks and balances], knowledge lacked methodologies, and language lacked rules."[459] The invoking of these archaic texts in modern society, with its highly elaborative institutions, laws, and rules only makes them incongruent with the collective impulse toward forward movement. Namely, by imposing these archaic texts on modern society they generate a cognitive dissonance among individuals and inhibit the process of progress and change in society.

The current culture war that generates greater social polarization, Salma avers, was ignited by "individuals and groups circumscribed to Islam."[460] This war is carried out "in the name of a certain reading of Islam, and it obliges us, educated men and women in the Arab and Islamic world, not to remain idle." How should Arab intellectuals face down this culture war, according to Salma? "Our response to the [current cultural] war should not focus on exonerating Islam, since the terrorists carry out their actions

[458] Bin Slama, "Masʾūliyatuna ʾAmām Al-ʾIrhāb Bi-ʾIsm Al-ʾIslam: Bayān," *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*, accessed December 5, 2017.
[459] Nāshīd, Saʿīd. *al-Ḥadāthah wa-al-Qurʾān* (Beirut, 2016), 25.
[460] Bin Slama, "Masʾūliyatuna ʾAmām Al-ʾIrhab Bi-ʾIsm Al-ʾIslam: Bayān."

in the name of certain reading of Islam." The solution Slama offered is to insist on a historical approach that decentralizes these readings. "We should acknowledge the historicity of the texts of our theological heritage [Turāth.] We should ensure that these [texts] are impossible to deploy [device] today, and we should bear the fallout of this impossibility." Slama acknowledges the challenge of digesting and assimilating the reality that the Turāth can no longer fit contemporary Arab needs. Therefore, she encourages her followers to mourn (*Hiddād*) the past to make way for a new age of modernity.

An Alternative Approach to the Turath: Productive Mourning

Taking a cue from Lafif Lakhdar, her countryman and colleague, Slama establishes the idea of mourning to exit the Turāth. Like Lakhdar, Slama believes that what stands between the current Arab subject and his willingness to embrace life in the twenty-first century is a textuality of which he had only a vague memory. Yet, this memory of the Turāth, no matter how misguided, shapes his resentment toward women's freedoms and sexuality. This memory also prevents him from embracing different modes of being. This is not the individual's fault but, rather, the fault of generations of Arab intellectuals, beginning with the *nahḍa*. Instead of awakening the Arab individual from their intoxication with the Turāth, the *nahḍa*'s primary failure was manifested in establishing a new form of continuity with the Turāth. Rather than curbing the invocation of the Turāth, during the nineteenth century, literary history flourished and expanded with the unintended result of establishing new bridges to the past. These literary histories by the most eminent pioneers of the *nahḍa* created continuity with the past more than they led to a historical break with that imagined past. Contemporary Arab subjects, Slama explains, grew comfortable thinking about their current life conditions in comparison with the fabricated Turāth. In other words, the *nahḍa* here is not celebrated as an era that effected a historical break but an era that enhanced the ties with the Turāth, dangerously forging new and imagined strings that pull Arabs towards their past.

Though Slama appreciates the *nahḍa*, she is still a fierce critic of the politics it unleashed. The first *nahḍa*, Slama writes, triggered anti- *nahḍa* sentiments. The development of the *nahḍa* movement was stunted by two forces. First, the "religious censorship" embodied in the institute of Al-Azhar exerted unyielding pressure on reformers like ʿAli ʿAbd al-Raziq, Taha Hussain, and Mansur Fahmi, to check and impede their progressive ideas. This religious authority imperiled the growth of the *nahḍa* movement by

"dulling the edges of the keen minds and reducing the innovative thrust the *nahḍa* scholars fought to bring about.". The second anti-*nahda* wave resulted from the oil leap or *al- Ṭafrah al-Nifṭiyya*, which made it possible to "spend $70 million on popularizing Wahhabism and its thought all over the Muslim world." This campaign had two edges: it put to death the *nahḍa* movement and helped anchor the current mode of religiosity among growing generations of Muslims."

Yet, there remained in the Arab world small islands that kept the fire of progressive thinking alive, not least of all Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco. While previous generations of Arab intellectuals failed to contain and check the movement toward the Turāth, Slama proposed a different strategy. The remedy for the undead past is to murder it. Modernity means mourning the past, she insists. Rather than celebrate the Turāth, the solution is to mourn its passing:"either we continue to cry over the past, imagining its restoration to life, or we realize the impossibility of its restoration to life… either we bury our mortalities and acknowledge their finitude and mourn over them, or we continue running after them, yielding to depression, imitating them in their death, rejecting life and its joy. This is the significant lesson Freud passed down to us in his Mourning and Melancholy."[461] Mourning, Slama expounds, is a healthy process to undertake, since it marks a collective confession of the passing of a tradition. It implies the last act of the death of the past. Since many Arab intellectuals perpetually put off the act of mourning, the past and the Turāth weigh them down, disrupting modern time with theological temporalities. Meaning, so long as intellectuals exhibit a recalcitrant refusal to mourn the passing of the Turāth, the formation of Arab subjectivity will live on synchronically in modernity and the Turāth. The fact that the Turāth resists death and lives on in the present undermines the process of history, Slama argues. One example of this can be found in the writing of the history of women in Islam. In Europe, women were accused of alliances with Satan, a conception that triggered a widespread witch hunt. Thousands of women were subjected to all forms of torture, abuse, and murder. In Islam, women's history has not been written yet, Slama said. "One reason for this absence is simply that this history that we must write did not even past."[462]

[461] Slama. *Naqd al-thawābit. p*. 28.
[462] Bin Slama. *Fī Naqd Insān Al-Jamū'.* p. 150–151.

Mourning for Slama constitutes a realization and a declaration that Arabic speakers can no longer embrace a non-linear, relational understanding of time that infuses present-day temporalities with the Turāth. It is a realization that would make it impossible to hark back to the Turāth. That mix of temporalities only aggravates Arab peoples' attempts to assimilate into the new (diachronic) times. Without a conscious decision to upend this relational (synchronic) time, individuals will be straddled with an unmitigated sense of guilt that quenches creativity and originality. The mourning of past historical episodes proposes that Slama meant to bring a closure to the open-ended relations with the Turāth. To disentangle these histories, she wants to mourn over the past to prevent people from reverting to it.

Transforming Relations with the Turāth

The manner in which contemporary Arab societies remember their past and celebrate their cultural icons leaves the young radicals deeply anxious and overwhelmed. The relations between present and past are crucial for young radicals intent on bringing about change to engrained cultural attitudes. Much of the great tribulations of this time, Slama maintains, are attributed to a distorted memory of the Arab and Islamic past. "We are afflicted with a disorder that has to do with archive and memory, since we are not able to distinguish between memory and amnesia… We are unable to [craft] a decent policy toward the archive, which helps us keep past things past and put others to waste. Only a distorted memory claims to preserve everything."[463]

While Slama's predecessors (Arkoun, Tarabishi, Abu Zayd) sought to chip away at the systematic cultural erasure that circumscribed the multifaceted Turāth within the limits of Islam, Slama and the young radicals are in agreement in their opposition against the excessiveness that attend to the obsessive preservation of "everything past." Speaking of the necessity for sifting through the past, Slama suggests establishing a new policy (by means of guidelines within intellectual circles) to encounter the deluge of the past into the present. The problem is not the past, in and of itself, but the way contemporary Arab societies treat that past; the "distortion in present Muslim societies" comes down to their "*relation* with the origin, memory, and archive."[464]

[463] Bin Slama, 131.
[464] Bin Slama, 129.

To decentralize the widespread conception of the past in contemporary Arab societies, Slama demonstrates that her goal is not to reinterpret sacred texts to derive yet another equitable model of relations between women and men. Hers is a far cry from rebuilding or reforming past histories. Instead, she privileges desacralizing the past by building a new conception (rather a new relation) around the idea of sacred that is related to specific time and place. For Slama, the idea of sacred [*al-Mukadas*] emerges from a specific space and time to alleviate a cultural anxiety or answer a social need. With this localized sense of the sacred, Slama reads the Turāth to parochialize the value of the sacred in Islamic textuality. The challenge is to make this relational conception of the sacred legible and approachable to the traditionalists who "dissolve history by perceiving sacred texts viable everywhere and anywhere."[465]

Past generations of Arab intellectuals focused on reforming Islam without addressing the sacred. They wagered on transforming certain Islamic principles to meet the needs of modernity. This intellectual effort fell short of creating new relations with the past. By asking, "how shall we reap the fruits of Islamic Reformers' failure?" Slama demonstrates that her generation's proclivities are far removed from previous generations of Arab reforms and intellectuals. In her comparison between the two generations, Slama writes that scores of reformers and intellectuals endeavored to disseminate ideas that called on separating between religion and "sacred violence," or "between religion and the insanity that produces violence." Yet, only a tiny minority called for a wholesale abolishment of the entire logic of reform and insisted on building different relations with the past. "These voices have been drowned out by louder voices that insisted on the literary implementation of Shariʿa's rules and the return to the fundamentals. Shall we reap the fruits of this failure by accepting religious renewal?"[466] In her mind Slama was alluding to the courageous and novel Tunisian voices at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as al-Tahir al-Haddad, whom the *nahḍa* literature had marginalized.[467]

The Shariʿa is only a text for Slama and her collegues. Over the course of fourteen centuries, Muslims grew accustomed to attaching a sacred value to it. What remains of much concern is not "[sacred]

[465] Bin Slama, 110.
[466] Bin Slama, "Hal Najnī Thimar Fashal Al-Iṣlaḥ al-Dinnī?, *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*, accessed December 6, 2017, http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=415642.
[467] Bin Slama. *Al-Hijab Wal-Marʾah*.

texts as such, but the ways in which current Muslims relate to them."[468] Here, Slama avoids embracing the call for a comprehensive annulment of the Shariʿa. Her insistence on shifting Muslim *relations* with their Shariʿa saves her from the fate that Lafif Lakhdar faced when he called for the Shari'a's wholesale abolishment. Yet, like Lakhdar, Slama thought that one of the reasons for the limited success of Arab seculars in reaching out to a broader swath of Arab readers is due to their hesitation on acknowledging the expiration or the termination of the Shariʿa. Their avoidance of clashing with the masses and their inability to tell the truth held back the cause of Arab seculars back.

Conclusion

One of the marks the last decades of the twentieth century carry is the entrenching of the Turāth into daily language. With the beginning of the 1980s, many school systems around the Arab world began marking the Turāth Holiday (*Yaūm al-Turath*) in their calendars beside national and religious holidays. The Turāth increasingly offered a compelling vocabulary to daily practices. Even seculars had to adjust their language and vocabularies. While in the 1950-60s secularism was grounded in western philosophies made available in Arabic in the mid-century, by the end of the century secular justifications were couched in Turāth language.

Bogged down with a Turāth discourse that produces and perpetuates certain viewpoints while excluding others, Arab intellectuals of the *Association* called to explore the contents of the Turāth while emphasizing the unthinkable aspects of Arab history. The younger generation of the Association however, come up with new categories like pain and violence to chart a new approach to the Turāth, undermine its essential understandings and destabilize its age-old meanings. In her wrestling with the Turāth, Slama asks what sympathies are enabled by the current understanding of the Turāth? She writes that the current "distorted appreciation" of the Turāth sustains categories like normative regimes that divide the world into good and evil domains, foreclosing any other possibility.

While the first generation took to historicizing the foundational texts of Arab history as the only means of limiting their scope and influence, young radicals like Slama took a giant step ahead in standing

[468] Bin Slāma, *Fī Naqd Insān Al-Jamūʿ*, 121.

up to the Turāthists by different means. They politicized literary criticism and weaponized psychoanalysis to show the concealed political and violent implications of the Turāth texts. One example of this approach can be witnessed in the way Slama addresses the controversial issue of Hijāb. Slama writes that the question of Hijāb should not only focus on its religious aspects. namely whether the Hijāb is inscribed in the Quran or not. The main question for Slama is to move beyond the theological debate and explore the social and cultural consequences made possible by the notion of Hijab as an institution. Adopting an archeological view of the study of Hijāb, Slama maintains that ideas of stoning women (*rajm)* for adultery take their meaning and justification only through the framework of the Hijāb (Institution). Rather than locating the discourse on Hijāb in the limited theological domain, as many scholars have done before her, Slamainvestigates the Hijāb's relation to the political, by asking: what justifies the common Islamic ideals of guardianship *Quamah* that is translated in precluding women to travel without man's trusteeship?[469]

The example of the Hijāb embodies the way Slama and other young radicals approach the Turāth. They think of the Turāth as a jumble of ideas and institutions interlocking in systems of meanings and semantics. The hidden connections between stonning and Hijāb is a good example that captures Slama's idea of dislocation. Veering away from legal Islamic codes, Slama is more concerned with the possibilities and conditions that the idea of Hijāb opens up or forecloses. These literary readings, which assume that text are not neutral but highly political, are only carried out by the second generation of the post-colonial Arab state and under the conditions of increasing paranoia with regard to the past.

[469] Bin Slama. *Al-Hijab Wal-Mar'ah*. See the Introduction.

CONCLUSION

In late Spring 2014, I went to Paris to meet Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, "one of the most prolific and powerful thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century"[470] in the Arab world. Armed with a notebook full of questions about his life and intellectual experiments, I was eager to meet a writer whose intellectual input and career have reshaped the contours of Arab thought. As soon as Ṭarābīshī emerged from the crowd in a stuffy café, I recognized his long face that Arab magazines' cartoonists made public. His bald head was particularly shiny on that rare sunny day, with a shaved and clean face. Ṭarābīshī invited me to his place, a neat and spacious apartment where he convened in the last decade with Nassir Hamid Abu Zayd, Mohammad Arkoun, Lafif Lakhdar and Al-Hawni.

Located in a predominantly Arab suburb around Paris, nothing in his apartment conveyed that a man of letters lived there. In fact, it left me with the impression that Ṭarābīshī led a quite ordinary life: he smoked frequently, watched Al-Jazeera news, listened to Arabic music (Sabah Fakhri and Jūrj Wassūf.) Yet, he lived a quite ascetic life, as he rarely ventured outside his apartment, nor did he seem to recognize his North African neighbors. Ṭarābīshī spent his time within the walls of this apartment, reading novels but seldom watching Hollywood movies. Decorated with pictures of his three daughters, one could not see any of his books around. Only one book, by the French writer Marcel Gauchet, was placed unattended on the furthest corner near the patio. A cluster of newspapers was stacked around an old computer stall that separated his dining from his living room with its khaki couches. With gloomy expectations about the prospects of Syria, he started the conversation by venting his frustrations: "we are through with progressive Arab politics. We are through with secularism. No secularism in the Arab world. Nor is there any Arab philosophy or Arab philosophers." With a gravelly voice, Ṭarābīshī was unambiguously indignant and his narrative was not entirely coherent. He spoke passionately but digressed. Despite his

[470] Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization*, 1 edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 163.

oceanic knowledge of the history of Syria since WWII, Ṭarābīshī notoriously took liberty with historical facts and dates. Still, ideas gush from him in great cascades.

"During the 1990s" he said, "I attended a conference in one of the Arab Gulf states [unnamed] and I took the opportunity to purchase some books on the Arab Turāth." Stopping for a minute to speak of his growing interest with the Turāth at the beginning of the 1990s, he continued: "to my dismay, I could not find any book whatsoever on the Medieval rationalist Islamic group of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā." One bookseller indicated to Ṭarābīshī that he could only find the books of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā in an old bookstore owned by an ex-Socialist. "What kind of Turāth is being propounded?" Ṭarābīshī asked while looking at me with disbelief. "Why is this progressive and rationalist school [of Ikhwan al-Ṣafā] being excluded from our Turāth? What is our Turāth and who decides on how to teach the Turāth in our school systems?" Ṭarābīshī then abruptly halted the intriguing questions on Turāth, turning the conversation to his writing against Jābirī. He promised to get back to the topic of Turāth but never did.

Prodding him to elaborate further on the formation of the new Arab intellectual landscape in the post-1967 era, Ṭarābīshī had only to smear recent Arab culture, speaking of his failed generation. Despite his expansive writings, translations, and output, Ṭarābīshī rightly complained of the fact that his name remained unrecognized. "Ever since I left Syria," Ṭarābīshī bitterly recalled, "I was never invited to my beloved country or acknowledged for what I have done." Yet, despite this outrage, Ṭarābīshī did not hold a grudge against Syria and its regimes. The raging war in Syria compelled him to endorse Assad. "What is the alternative?" he asked rhetorically. Pressing him on the question of his support of Assad, Ṭarābīshī could not see that this endorsement of the regime was incongruent with his radical politics. Evading my political questions, he wanted to focus the discussion on Arab thought instead. His mind was haunted by something else: Mohammad Abed al-Jābirī. "When Mohammad Jābirī visited me in this apartment in 1987, I agreed with him on the challenge of authenticity and the Turāth as top subjects on Arab intellectual's agenda." Before becoming enemies, Ṭarābīshī and Jābirī had a great friendship that went back to 1957 when the latter came to Damascus University on a fellowship to study Arabic. Unprompted, Ṭarābīshī said "Jābirī was not particularly adroit with girls," sneering at the differences that set them apart: "I was a handsome young man." Throwing things into a conversation out of context is by no means

spontaneous when coming from one of the Arab world's authorities on Sigmund Freud. This "Freudian Slip" meant to say that the acrimony between the two reaches back to the slight differences in the ways they approached women. Namely, at the center of the recent spat between the Mashriq and the Maghreb, which was inflated to an unprecedented scale with Ṭarābīshī and Jābirī, lies deep cultural differences in orientations, not only towards women, but also with regard to issues like religion, nationalism and sex.

Despite their shared national experience, Ṭarābīshī and Jābirī were pulled in different and increasingly diverging directions in the wake of the defeat in 1967. For Jābirī, the defeat signaled that the project of decolonization pioneered by intellectuals in Beirut and Cairo had fallen short of addressing the pressing question of Turāth. For Ṭarābīshī, the mere question of engaging the Turāth meant a giant step backwards, a question that "ripped through Arab culture".[471] If there is a cause at the root of this growing disparity between the Mashriq and the Meghrib, between Ṭarābīshī and Jābirī, it lies in the undiminished sense of disillusionment with the post-colonial condition. This sense of frustration and outrage that Samir Kassir and Elizabeth Kassab adeptly captured, began with the defeat in 1967.

In the wake of the defeat in 1967 war, the vanquished nations of the Arab world found their solace and comfort in their past experience, which gradually emerged as a cultural question. Writers who previously dedicated themselves to existentialist philosophy had to pause and reckon with the unprocessed weight of the Turāth. One of those well-known scholars was Badawī, an Egyptian philosopher and a genuine translator of European ideas. "The *annus horribilis* of 1967 forced Badawi to rethink the ongoing riddle of Arab existence. He was hardly alone. Gradually, he gave up the synthesis of Western and Islamic philosophy and returned—some say escaped—to the warm bosom of religious heritage, or turath, where he longed for a different kind of homecoming… this form of return was not just a personal journey but a generational move away from the universal culture of the 1960s and deeper into the familiar and safer domains of religiosity."[472]

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[471] See Jābirī's critique in:Muḥammad ʻĀbid Jābirī, *Al-Khiṭāb Al-ʻArabī Al-Muʻāṣir*, al-Ṭabʻah 2 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalīʻah, 1985); For the response see: Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn Al-ʻArab Wa-Al-Turāth: Al-Taḥlīl Al-Nafsī Li-ʻiṣābin Jamāʻī* (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 1991).

[472] Di-Capua, *No Exit*, 251.

Even more than the surprise of the defeat itself, it was the reactions to the defeat that unsettled many Arab intellectuals. One of those shattering surprises was the disheartening realization of the resilience and permanency of the *undead past*. Speaking of the traumatic effects of the defeat of 1967, Ṭarābīshī recalled during the interview that "I danced in my life twice, the first time was when the war in June 1967 started. The second time was when the Islamic revolution in Iran overthrew the Shah in 1979." The war in 1967 seemed, initially at least, to merit Ṭarābīshī's exultation: it promised not only to redress what Ṭarābīshī's generation conceived as "the wrongs of colonialism," but the preparations of the war were also seen as a giant step forward that would do away with the past. Ṭarābīshī danced in June 1967 because he thought that his generation was making good on their longstanding promises to change the Arab man: free, sovereign and authentic. Like many of his colleagues, Ṭarābīshī's dance reflects this dream, enhanced and fostered by existential ideals of being, authenticity, independence, and self-determination. As the war ended and the news spread that Arab armies were in disarray, Ṭarābīshī regretted dancing. It is only when one reconsiders why Ṭarābīshī avowed not to dance any longer that one can approach the question of what was defeated in 1967?

More than a mere military defeat, 1967 signaled a defeat of a generation's collective vision. At the beginning of the 1970s, the remarkable yet forgotten Syrian Marxist, Yassin al-Hafiz, explicated in his autobiography *The Defeat and the Defeated Ideology* that what the 1967 war debunked was not Arab militaries, nor Arab regimes. Rather it was an "absolute cultural defeat" (*hazimah ḥaḍariya shamilah*) that was discredited in 1967. Yet, what did al-Hafiz mean by cultural defeat? Al-Hafiz's statement comports well with Ṭarābīshī's disillusionment with his dance, a feeling that touched a host of other Arab Leftists who saw their careers taking radical turns after the 1967 war: Edward Said, Hisham Sharabi, Fawwāz Tarabulsi, Yazid Sāyigh, Sadiq al-Azm, Mutāʿ Safadi, Radwan al-Sayyid and countless others. As this dissertation demonstrates throughout, it was a certain vision that was defeated in the 1967, a vision that took for granted the obsoleteness of the Arab cultural past. It is this vision that ignored the centrality of Turāth in shaping people's lives and tastes, a vision that gave rise to unrealistic cultural ambitions and political projects that fell and shattered like breaking glass. The defeat proved that Arab Leftists were eager to get ahead of themselves, that they refused to redress their relations with the Turāth in order to

pave the way for the future through ideas like socialism, Arab nationalism, and Marxism. In a sense, the Arab Left wanted to do history by skipping over their burdening history; they disregarded their past and embraced others' future. The return to the Turāth, however, sounded the death knell of this vision, awakening Arab intellectuals to all their illusions. The defeat served as a wakeup call, a harbinger that the past was both unchecked, unprocessed and undead.

Discarding the previous visions of decolonization provided a cultural context in which new questions and social themes emerged. This is the context in which, for the first time in modern Arab history, religion, or Islam specifically, becomes a problem. In no other time in the entire modern history of the Arab world was religion articulated as a problem as it was with the generation of the 1960s. In 1969, a young Marxist, Yale graduate student, Sadiq al-Azm gave expression to the rising anxiety around Islam when he published *Critique of Theological Thought*. Azm spoke for many among the Arab Left and his book instantly became a bestseller. Never before the 1967was Islam seen as a cultural problem. If any distinctive line exists that sets apart the intellectual debates of the post-1967, it is this epistemological break with the previous discourses that sought to accommodate Islam into modernity. Ever since the beginning of the Arab Awakening of the 19th century, Islam was conceived as amenable to changes and reform. Starting with Tahtawi through Abduh to Ali Abd al-Raziq, Islam was made to fit with modernity and reconciled with the frameworks of modernity.

This course Azm initiated in *Critique of Theological Thought* was central to a group of thinkers and writers in Beirut and elsewhere in the Arab world. This initial understanding that Islam is a problem (rather than an asset) was at the root of the continuing conversation that morphed into the Turāth. In the years that followed its publication, both fundamental Islam and authoritarian Arab regimes coalesced to squeeze out dissention, unorthodox voices, and defiance. Soon Al-Azm and his publisher were taken to court, forcing Arab states to implement stringent rules of publication, increase the regulation of free thinkers, and check irreverent publications that stir public disturbances. Stifling the works of radical Arab Leftists prompted many of them to seek refuge in the West, particularly in Paris.

The Arab Rationalist Association picked up where Al-Azm and his publishing house of al-Tali'a left off. The circumstances that goaded them to embrace radicalism and resume what Azm had begun were

clear: increased marginalization, public alienation, and a mass appeal to the Turāth. The more the second generation felt left behind, the more their critical tone appeared.

The Arab Rationalist Association fashioned two generations. The young radicals' departure from the first generation was crucial and detrimental. While the first generation deemed the metaphorical Arab tree unstable and embarked on trimming the dry and dead branches, the second generation thought the roots of the tree, which feed and fuel the branches, are the source of vice and evil. Any treatment of contemporary Arab society, they maintained, should not cut off undesired branches, crop unwanted leaves to make Arab society look orderly. For them, the idea was to assail the Islah movement, which meant more work would be required to dig up the roots.

Yet, what the members of the *Association* could not see was that their opponents were partly right in holding on to the belief that secularism could be built on unsecular/theological foundations. In fact, the deconstruction of the sacred text, which hold the community of believers together and binds them into one human group that helps them endure tyrannical regimes afflicting them with numerous atrocities, remains essential in to the formation of their subjectivity. This subjectivity prioritized faith, which shielded it against unfair regimes. Indeed, over the years of the post-colonial experiment in the Arab world Islam provided the only refuge from the violence of the nation state.

At the time that the Association insisted on cutting the roots of the Arab tree, other groups sounded the alarm against such a hasty and imprudent move. Cutting the roots might not lead to the opening of new horizons. Along the way it might lead society astray. Among others things, cutting the roots means taking away the main attachments that provide a sense of normalcy in times of extreme uncertainty. But it also stands that if people are torn from their attachments they might be prone to grab bad norms in their place. Take away their sense of belonging to the Islamic faith and the result is that each one will seek a new identity in his tribe, village and region. They might not embrace the secular but they might become the worst version of themselves.

On March 2016, two years after the interview, Ṭarābīshī passed away quietly in his apartment in Paris, surrounded only by his wife and three daughters. None of his post-colonial colleagues lived enough to stand by him. Even his close friend Sadiq Al-Azm could not attend his funeral. Times have dramatically

changed for Syrian intellectuals. Over the course of the Syrian war the relations between these two eminent Syrian intellectuals strained and almost severed with Azm's insistence on taking a stand against the tyrannical regime in Syria. Ṭarābīshī's voice always dithered when he was asked to condemn the regime, evading the clear language that many of his readers found so compelling in his writings.[473]

Dozens of obituaries appeared in Arabic dailies the next morning commended Ṭarābīshī's intellectual works. They spoke highly of his meticulous translations and intellectual input since the beginning of the 1960s. Some have captured the current tragedy unfolding in Syria with the loss of one of its major sons, describing an entire world receding as new times of terror looms ahead. None, however, pointed out the Arab Rationalist Association that Ṭarābīshī worked hard to establish. Foregrounding his late writings on the Turāth came at the expense of downgrading his main legacy of the Association. Why was the Association forgotten? Was it by mere accident that the Association went unmentioned? Overlooking the Association speaks loudly of limited reach of this group of intellectuals. It conveys, to some degree, the clear message that the last word on the Turāth has yet to be determined.

[473] Ḥājj Ṣāliḥ, *Al-Thaqāfah Ka-Siyāsah*, 2016.

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